

The Promise of Pentecost



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12 Messages on Sanctification*

**“For this is the will of God, your sanctification. ...
Therefore he who rejects this does not reject
man, but God, who has also given us
His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:3, 8).**



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Preface: The Importance of Pentecost

The spiritual foundation of the church of Christ was laid during the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus when He made atonement for the sins of a lost world (John 1:29; Eph. 1:7). Through His resurrection from the grave He conquered death and sin, and as the living and triumphant Christ He offers us a new life of spiritual fruitfulness and victory over sin (1 Cor. 15:17-22). However, a special empowerment by the Holy Spirit was needed to enable the disciples to proclaim this important message in a hostile and sinful world (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8). The enduing with power from on high occurred on the day of Pentecost, and that was the practical beginning of the dispensation of the Christian church on earth. On that day, three thousand souls were regenerated by the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem to become members of the body of Christ, which is His true church among all nations.

We are still in the church age but, in the light of the signs of the times, very close to its end. According to the Bible we are living in a time of spiritual lukewarmness and apostatising (Matt. 24:4-5, 11-12, 1 Tim. 4:1), and because of that we are so much more in need of a fresh anointing by the Holy Spirit. Sanctification does have a definite starting-point when we trust the Lord for the filling of the Holy Spirit, but it is also an ongoing process which should often be renewed by soul-searching, cleansing from sin, as well as a complete surrender to the Lord. We should grow spiritually, increase in the grace and knowledge of Christ, while consistently striving to attain a more complete measure of Christlikeness.

Pentecost is therefore pre-eminently a time of humbling and self-examination with a view to laying aside every attitude, word or action which grieves the Holy Spirit. A heart and life which has been purified anew can also again be filled with the Holy Spirit. If we honour our own commitment and obligation with regard to sanctification (2 Cor. 7:1), the Lord will richly bless us and more fully control our lives through His Spirit. During continued consecration there will be no backsliding (Heb. 12:15) but instead a marked increase in the grace of God and the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Lord encourages us through His Spirit to press towards higher levels of service and faithfulness. When all stumbling-blocks of doctrinal deception, carnality, sin, unbelief and worldliness have been removed, the Lord will greatly use us in His service. It is only when His servants bow before the authority of His Word that He will strengthen them to be more than conquerors in Christ (Rom. 8:37). The Lord Jesus entrusted a very important and life-changing message to His disciples, which should be proclaimed with boldness. However, to be worthy for this assignment they must first, themselves, be living examples of His saving grace, divine wisdom and power to overcome. We are living in an end-time world which has already apostatised to the extent that more and more people are living very far from the Lord and His righteousness, many of them even twisting and perverting the gospel of Christ to their own destruction (Gal. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:16). Every child of God has a duty to study the Bible with greater dedication, to accept every promise by faith, and to always observe its conditions.

We must continuously walk in the light of the Lord's presence, but particularly during the time of Pentecost we should make very sure that there is nothing between us and Him, as that will ensure better insight into His Word. We should be able to hear the Lord's voice through the instruction of the Holy Spirit who wishes to guide us into all truth. He is ever ready to empower us with boldness to proclaim to an agnostic, sceptical and wayward world that, through the Lord's grace, they can be saved, sanctified and endued with divine power to prevail. It is only the man and woman, boy and girl, whose lives are anchored to the rock of the Lord's Word, who will be able to successfully face the storms of impending judgements by which a wicked world will be struck in the end-time. Spiritual dedication and vigilance is the guarantee which believers have that they are not destined for the judgements of the tribulation (Luke 21:36).

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1. Spiritual Characteristics of the True Church

Scripture reading: “Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming – in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning – lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:33-37).



Busy gathering a harvest



Watch against the enemy's attacks



A shining light in a dark world



Ready to depart

There are various prophecies in the Bible by which Christians are encouraged to be vigilant and ready for the sudden coming of the heavenly Bridegroom. These instructions and admonitions should be taken seriously as there are so many things that can divert the attention of a believer from his calling as a servant of Christ. We must be able to boldly give an account of our life when our Master returns at an unexpected hour. On that day He will catch away His bride to her heavenly abode, and then it will be too late to make all the preparations which are needed to be spiritually worthy for this wonderful appointment with the Bridegroom.

The command to watch

In His prophetic discourse the Lord describes a disposition of readiness which should prevail among His servants. He urges us to avoid that our spiritual vision grows dim, that we lose touch with Him, with His commands and promises, with preparations for His second coming, with the great extent of our task in His kingdom, and with the seriousness of the dangers which confront us. It shouldn't be necessary to send someone to wake us up with a view to seeking the face of the Lord, to actively expect His second coming, and to seriously engage in the things which He commanded us to do. We should always watch and pray.

There are two important tests to determine the degree of readiness for Christ's coming, i.e. firstly the honouring of our basic obligation in the expansion of His world-wide kingdom, and secondly the use of spiritual armour to achieve victories over the multiple attacks on our spiritual convictions and life of faith. If we actively expect the Lord Jesus we should be diligent in executing the task of being His witnesses everywhere, while resisting the enemy to keep him from blinding, deceiving and robbing us, or enticing us to disregard or even abandon our calling and consequently falling asleep spiritually.

In a certain sense, the future of the whole world depends upon the faithfulness and vigilance of evangelical Christians, as they have been called to be the light of a dark world and to gather a harvest for the kingdom of heaven among all peoples, tribes and nations. The great significance of the doctrine on spiritual vigilance and readiness for the second coming is evident from the fact that it is often discussed in the New Testament. If we heed all these commands and guidelines we will be well prepared on the day when the trumpet sounds. The following are a number of the most significant pronouncements on spiritual dedication and perseverance which the Lord expects from us:

Lead a Spirit-filled life

In the parable on the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) it is clearly stated that the big difference between the wise and foolish virgins is related to the extra oil which the wise virgins have taken along. The oil is a well-known symbol of the Holy Spirit, and fixes our attention on His indispensable role in the lives of all believers – firstly with regard to rebirth and secondly for the realisation of sanctification. The filling of the Holy Spirit is associated with a surrender in faith which is done by those who are already born again by the Holy Spirit, but not yet filled with the Spirit. The experience of being Spirit-filled enables the believer to grow up to spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:11-14), to be a witness for Christ (Acts 1:8), to prevail over temptations and sin (Gal. 5:16), to entertain the correct perspective on the coming of the Bridegroom (John 16:13), and to be a watchful and praying Christian (Luke 21:36).

Believers who fail to take this step of dedication are acting foolishly and confine themselves to a fleshly life which is not under the control of the Holy Spirit, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). Such double-hearted believers do not have the motivation or power to resist the rising tide of sin and unrighteousness, and that explains why they are growing cold in their love (Matt. 24:12) and are consequently not able to make the necessary preparations for meeting the Bridegroom when He comes.

It is not the will of the Lord Jesus that His followers would be negligent on the nature of their spiritual lives, and to this end He did not only make provision for the forgiveness of their sins during rebirth but also for their sanctification. The objective with sanctification is: "... to present to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

We should not stagnate spiritually after being regenerated by the Holy Spirit and becoming Christians, but also ensure that we obtain the extra oil in our life by trusting the Lord for the filling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). He expects us to pursue holiness (1 Thess. 4:7-8), without which no one will see the Bridegroom (Heb. 2:14).

Strive after complete sanctification

The experience of filling with the Holy Spirit is also described as "complete sanctification", which alludes to the fact that sanctification starts at rebirth but is subsequently consummated by being filled with the Holy Spirit during a full surrender: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thess.

5:23-24). This prayer was prayed for Christians who were already born again, and one of its specific aims was to further prepare them for the second coming.

It is God who works through His Spirit to accomplish the work of complete sanctification in our lives, but we have the obligation to trust Him for this blessing and give our full cooperation by putting off all filthiness of the sins of fleshliness, pride, materialism, licentiousness, etc., thereby observing the command towards perfecting holiness: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). We should be dedicated towards walking the narrow way without any spiritual or moral compromise.

Work in the harvest fields

All Christians have been commissioned to do work which will contribute towards the expansion of God's kingdom on earth. Jesus said to His disciples: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). The Christian church has a duty to evangelise the entire world during this dispensation. That was never going to be an easy task as its extent is vast and the hostility from the unsaved world extremely fierce. We should accept the challenge of accomplishing this commission, despite incessant hostility from multiple adversaries. Jesus said to His disciples: "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:2-3). However, we have the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfil this great work and to face the opposition of an evil world (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8).

The Lord will demand accountability from His servants for the extent to which they executed the Great Commission (Matt. 25:14-30). Some of them will receive rewards of grace, while others will offer unacceptable excuses for their spiritual unfaithfulness and lack of involvement with the task at hand (Luke 19:11-27). Fleshly and egoistic Christians are ease-loving people who are not really concerned about the salvation of other people.

Correctly managing your time

The command with regard to vigilance emphasises the important factor of time. There is no time to slumber and sleep, and in our over-organised lives we should redeem the time to devote to our spiritual commitments. That also includes time for prayer and Bible study. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples when they were overcome by sleepiness during a crisis situation: "What, could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:40-41).

Each of us has only one life and limited opportunities to do our part in evangelising the world. In the light of this fact it is important to correctly determine our priorities and to manage our time in such a way that we can pay to God what we owe Him. At the same time, it will ensure that we do not become spiritually impoverished but also do things which have value for eternity, thereby laying up treasures in heaven.

In the light of eternity our earthly life is very short, so we have to use every opportunity to do as much work as possible. Even the Lord Jesus knew that He had to do many things during His earthly ministry before the time for that would have expired at His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. He said: "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). The night of God's judgements will also come over the world at the end of the church age, and by that time we should have completed our work.

Guard against the enemy's attacks

The Lord Jesus did not promise His disciples an earthly life without sorrows and problems, and without any struggle against the opposing kingdom of darkness – on the contrary! Christians of all ages are confronted with the enemy of their souls as he is intent on discouraging and deceiving them, robbing them from their joy in the Lord and trying to destroy

their faith. Also in this regard we need the protection of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit to be conquerors: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:10-11).

Satan's attacks and temptations are mainly focussed on two areas, i.e. the spiritual and moral foundations of our life. He continuously tries to deceive Christians spiritually, and Jesus strongly warned us against these efforts in His Olivet Discourse: "Take heed that no one deceives you. ... Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. ... For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:4, 11, 24).

The other target on which the attacks of the devil are aimed at is the moral sphere of our lives. He will try everything possible to induce Christians to yield to fleshly lusts such as self-enrichment, pride, involvement with corrupt practices, extra-marital relations, vindictiveness, and the rude denouncing of all people who dare to oppose them and try to correct their behaviour. We should prevail over all these temptations through the power of the Holy Spirit: "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

Overcome the sorrows of life

One of the factors which undermines the spiritual life of many Christians is depression caused by the increasing sorrows, problems and disappointments of life (Luke 21:34). When people are bogged down spiritually and emotionally by continuous negative experiences, their faith becomes weakened, while their hope on the second coming of Christ with the prospect of living with Him in heaven starts dwindling. Depression does not only promote a disposition of apathy with regard to matters of faith, but also leads to social disengagement and the neglecting of secular duties such as work and studies. Such people need a strong support group to motivate them and, above all, a new surrender to the Lord for the strengthening of their wavering faith. The promise on the soon return of the Lord can play an important role in re-establishing the joy of the Lord in their darkened hearts.

Develop the correct prophetic perspective

It is extremely important to entertain the correct prophetic perspective at all times, as that would ensure that you correctly determine your priorities and, as a believer, is well prepared on what the future holds. To be able to do that, you should gain absolute clarity on the sequence of prophetic events as that would keep you from becoming involved with activities which are prophetically irrelevant. Such activities always lead to the unnecessary wasting of time, money and energy, which is spiritually counter-productive and should be avoided. Entertaining the correct prophetic perspective calls for clarity on the following matters:

- In the counsel of God, the dispensation of the church is preceded by the dispensation of the law. This transition has already been made, which means that we are no longer under law (neither the sabbatical laws) but under grace (Rom. 6:15; 10:4; Gal. 5:4).
- The church dispensation coincides with the international dispersion of Israel. However, at the end of this dispensation Israel is again, as a nation, being restored to their land (Ezek. 37:21; Luke 21:24). The church is not the spiritual Israel and should not lay claim to this position by practising replacement theology.
- During the church age we are living in a world which lies in the sway of the Evil One (1 John 5:19), and that demands much attention towards spiritual warfare. This fact also explains the persecution and oppression of evangelical Christians, which occurred intermittently throughout the centuries.
- The church age culminates in a great falling away as a run-up to the revelation of the man of sin (the Antichrist) who will rule the world for seven years. Even evangelical churches

who are not vigilant enough will be affected by false doctrines if they fail to realise that the following world empire to be established will be that of the Antichrist. Christ's reign of peace will only be established after the destruction of the Antichrist's global government. We should be cautious about which kingdom we support and promote. Present humanistic initiatives towards globalism play into the hands of the Antichrist.

- The tribulation of seven years will, apart from the Antichrist's reign of terror, also be characterised by a large number of divine judgements upon an unrepentant world. For this reason, the Lord will first remove His children by way of the rapture (Luke 21:36; 1 Thess. 4:16-17) as they are not destined for God's judgements (Rom. 8:1). Christians should be actively engaged in preparations to appear before the Lord.
- Those who do not believe in a pretribulational rapture, deprive Christians of the blessed hope of the sudden coming of Christ, replace this imminent prospect by an Antichrist expectation and, in teachings to their followers, give undue attention to survival strategies during the coming tribulation period (e.g. storing up food and medicine in remote places of refuge). This approach is deceptive and counter-productive.
- The millennial reign of Christ will only be instituted after the seven years of tribulation. Before that happens, the Lord Jesus will destroy His enemies (Rev. 19:19-21), save the remnant in Israel (Rom. 11:25-26), and restore the throne of David in Jerusalem (Acts 15:16-17). Christians who are now (during the church age) trying to expedite this kingdom through techniques such as transformation rallies, strategic spiritual warfare on the national level, as well as an ecumenical alliance between various churches, are completely misapprehending the Lord's counsel and engage in wishful thinking. We have not been called to live as kings right now in a fully revealed kingdom, but to be soldiers for the cross who are ready for an increased struggle against the kingdom of darkness.

Be ready to appear before the judgement seat

End-time prophecies confront all Christians with the appointment which they have before the judgement seat of Christ to give account of their lives as disciples of Jesus: "For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ. ... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10, 12).

Paul reminds the church in Corinth that we cannot take it for granted that every Christian only does works that have value for eternity, and that all the works of believers will necessarily pass the test before the judgement seat. It is possible to build upon the foundation of repentance with wood, hay and straw (i.e. worthless, fleshly works) and for that reason Paul cautions believers to take heed how they build upon this foundation: "... each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:13-15). The Lord knows our hearts, as well as the inducement to all our acts, whether they were motivated by the flesh or the Spirit.

From the judging of Christians' works it is evident that sanctification is indispensable to doing works that are acceptable to the Lord, as only the fruit of the Holy Spirit complies with this standard. Fleshly works which are done through people's own initiative and strength will go up in flames like wood, hay and straw, while the responsible person will stand before the Lord empty-handed – saved, but only just. Make sure that it will not happen to you.

Pursue greater Christlikeness

An active expectation of the soon coming of the heavenly Bridegroom and our being gathered to Him, challenges us to conform to His image of holiness and purity: "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). This condition refers to

moral as well as doctrinal purity. Personal holiness is important as we are called upon to be holy in all our conduct (1 Pet. 1:15). However, we should also be cleansed from spiritual impurity as it affects our life of faith and negatively impacts on our relationship with the Lord Jesus. All false teachings should be abandoned, so we can grow unimpeded in the grace and knowledge of Christ: "You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:17-18). He is full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

The time has almost come for the trumpet to blow and announce the end of the church dispensation when we will be snatched away to be in the wonderful presence of the Bridegroom: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:16-18). Our places on earth will suddenly be empty, and the shock among those who are left behind will be severe.

The day when we behold the heavenly Bridegroom in all His splendour, our faith will be fulfilled by a glorious reality. Paul says the Lord Jesus will come in that day "to be glorified in His saints and to be admired by all those who believe" (2 Thess. 1:10). It is with a view to our preparations for this very special meeting that John says: "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

2. Journey to the Promised Land

Scripture reading: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. ... Now all these things happened to them as examples [types], and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:1-6, 11).

Paul urges the New Testament church to heed the lessons of God’s dealings with Israel, and to also learn from their mistakes, since we are all on a journey to eternity. Israel’s exodus from Egypt is an example of this pilgrimage. They departed on a journey which started during the slaying of the paschal lamb and eventually brought them into the Promised Land. Only a small group of them took to heart the spiritual lessons on sanctification and deeper dedication which the Lord had taught them on this journey. The great majority of the nation faltered spiritually and often sinned grievously.

Israel’s liberation from Egypt and their exodus from the land of their sinful past to move out and serve the Lord away from their oppressors, is a type of the salvation of sinners and their subsequent separation from spiritual bondage in order to live a new life of serving the Lord without any compromise with the world. The journey on which Israel embarked from Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan is a type of the New Testament way of holiness. The spiritual callousness of Israel and their repeated refusal to subject themselves to God’s guidance, foreshadowed the attitude of New Testament Christians who persist with their fleshliness and love for the world, thereby failing to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.

Paul says we must heed the warnings about Israel’s apostasy, particularly in view of the fact that so few Christians persevere on the way of holiness and complete surrender to the Lord. If we continue to pursue bad, fleshly lusts we will handicap our growth in faith and even completely obstruct our spiritual growth.

Israel’s journey of redemption started right inside Egypt where the people were powerless slaves of Pharaoh. The paschal lamb which was sacrificed in Egypt prophetically foreshadowed the Lord Jesus as the spotless Lamb of God who was sacrificed for the sins of the whole world. Paul says: “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). “In Him we have redemption through His blood” (Eph. 1:7). Peter says that we were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19). The glorified church will sing out to the Lamb around His throne: “You were slain, and has redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9).

After Israel had been saved from Pharaoh’s power, they immediately moved out of Egypt towards a new destination. After we have been delivered from Satan’s power and crossed over from spiritual darkness into God’s marvellous light, we are on a journey to fulfil God’s purpose with our lives. We are called to walk the way of increased holiness on which we often meet with new challenges from which we should emerge stronger in the Lord every time. Our salvation is only the beginning of a long journey of spiritual growth, on which we should persevere until all the wonderful promises of the Lord are fulfilled in our lives.

Shortly after Israel had been liberated from Egypt, they were confronted and attacked by another enemy, i.e. the Amalekites. Armed horsemen of Amalek overtook and killed Israelites who moved slowly and lagged behind. In this case the enemy penetrated the migrating nation and attacked those who trailed behind the main group as they were the easiest target. Amalek is a type of the devil who attacks God’s people from the inside, and as such he depicts the innate sinful nature which needs to be conquered. Pharaoh is a type of the devil who attacks from the outside, thereby trying to rule over people, enslave them and kill them. After the Lord

had saved Israel from Pharaoh's domination and broke the power which he wielded over them, they urgently also needed to conquer this other enemy who operated from within.

In the New Testament, we as believers are in the same situation. After a person has been saved from Satan's power, the devil still has an ally in this person's life which is his old, sinful nature or the old man. The devil therefore works from the inside through the flesh to attack a believer spiritually, to incapacitate him and render his life fruitless. We also need to prevail over this enemy from the inside if we wish to make spiritual progress.

Israel arrived at Rephidim where water flowed from the rock. This was not only the beginning of a peaceful phase after gaining victory over Amalek, but they were also inwardly refreshed. God cleft a rock for His people and availed them with a stream of water from which they could drink. After this uplifting experience there was a positive turn of events in the war against Amalek, and Israel achieved a resounding victory. The clash with Amalek was very intense. When Moses raised his hands in blessing, Joshua and his men prevailed over the forces of Amalek. But when Moses lowered his hands, Amalek prevailed. This is a typical situation of falling and rising again. As a solution to this problem, Aaron and Hur supported the hands of Moses to keep them up, and so Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Aaron, the priest, personifies prayer while Hur (Whiteness or Purity) personifies holiness. We cannot gain victory in the struggle over the flesh without continuous prayer and a wholehearted surrender towards holiness.

In 1 Corinthians 10:4 Paul says that the cleft rock points to Christ. The stream of water alludes to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Christ was "struck" on the cross and subsequently raised from the dead. He invites all of us to drink from this stream and become spiritually revived: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive" (John 7:37-39).

Through the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and the filling of the Holy Spirit we can prevail over the innate sinful nature. This struggle should coincide with continuous prayer and a holy walk. Persevere with spiritual warfare until Amalek has been utterly defeated. After this victory you can also rest in the Lord and in His strength as the inward conflict between the Spirit and the flesh has been settled through the consistent application of divine armour. Amalek will again return and try to revive the flesh, but if your relationship with the Lord is sound the Evil One will never again achieve his purpose to control you. Only persevere on the way of prayer and holy living and give to the devil no place (Eph. 4:27).

It is important to note that the struggle against Amalek never ends but continues throughout all generations: "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex. 17:16). Every new generation of people should also be delivered from their indwelling, sinful nature. After that victory, the resistance against any form of domination by the flesh should continue unabated as the flesh must remain in a crucified position and not be allowed to revive and regain its lost control. The Lord Jesus emphasised that a daily commitment is needed to this end: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). After Amalek has been defeated and we have entered into the victorious life, we should increasingly be conformed to the crucified Christ to ensure that we keep on walking by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

After the Holy Spirit has gained full control over a person's life and endued him with power to prevail over sin, He will also guide the person to more thoroughly understand the Word of God. The Lord Jesus said: "When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). The same principle also applied to believing Israelites, which enabled them to say: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps. 119:11). The words of our Saviour are Spirit and they are life (John 6:63).

The liberated people of God arrived at Sinai on the 50th day after their exodus from Egypt, and sojourned there for about a year. A new life awaited them as God's people, which called for new religious and moral principles to be instilled in them. They needed to have a thorough

knowledge of the laws of God, and conscientiously walk in accordance with His precepts. If they would have fully embraced the lessons of faith, prayer, holy living as well as victory over evil forces, Sinai would have been a marvellously fulfilling experience. Unfortunately, with only a few exceptions, the contrary is true. Most of the Israelites only had an outward form of godliness as their hearts still yearned for the pots of meat in Egypt. When Moses stayed too long on the mountain to the people's liking when he received the laws of the Lord, they made a golden calf, danced before this abominable image and honoured it as their god who had led them out of Egypt (Ex. 32:1-6). This is completely unthinkable but it nevertheless happened. That is why the Lord says that Israel's lusting after evil things has been written as a warning to us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. If we backslide and start insulting God by our actions, we will also ignite His anger over us. We cannot bow down before idols such as Mammon and think that God will be tolerant of our blasphemous behaviour.

The spiritual meaning of Sinai is that the Word of God should be written in our hearts. Paul says: "... clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3). We should grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour (2 Pet. 3:18), so we can have a working knowledge of God's Word. We should dedicate ourselves to continued Bible study after we have surrendered ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Whether we conduct a formal Bible study by enrolling for one or other course or whether we gain this knowledge through self-study does not really matter. The basic fact is that we need to do systematic Bible study as then alone can we be used by the Lord. Have you studied the Word of the Lord so your footsteps can be firmly anchored to it? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16), then you will be able to proclaim it to others with good effect.

The challenge of a life of fullness

Israel did not positively react to the spiritual lessons which they had learned during their journey through the wilderness, and were therefore not well prepared to face the challenges that awaited them by entering into the Promised Land. Moses sent out twelve spies to explore the land and then report back. Joshua was one of them (Num. 13:17-20). The great majority of these explorers (ten of the twelve) became terrified at the sight of the inhabitants of the land and advised Israel not to try and occupy the land. After 40 days of investigating they reported as follows to Moses:

"We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan. Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it. But the men who had gone up with him said, We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored" (Num. 13:27-32; NIV). Wrong spiritual advice always undermines people's faith in God.

However, Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people and tried to restore their faith in the omnipotence of God: "Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them. But the whole assembly talked about stoning them" (Num. 14:6-10; NIV).

Moses also confirmed what Joshua and Caleb had said: "The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet, for all that, you did not

believe the LORD your God” (Deut. 1:30-32).

The large majority of Israelites who did not believe that God could give them the land of Canaan, forfeited God’s promises because of their unbelief, and that generation perished in the wilderness. Only members of the young generation, who put their faith in the Lord under the leadership of Joshua, were worthy to take possession of the land. The exploration of the Promised Land was an important turning-point on Israel’s journey from Egypt. If the nation had accepted the Lord’s instructions by faith, they would have been well prepared and spiritually strong enough to accept the big challenge of crossing over into the land. However, unbelieving Israel preferred to permanently stay in the wilderness rather than, together with the Lord, taking possession of their inheritance across the Jordan. Many of them were even prepared to return to Egypt and again become slaves of Pharaoh. They chose the easy way of the least resistance, and because of that they impoverished themselves to the point where they were unworthy to inherit the promises and rich blessings of the Lord.

A modern repetition of unbelief

Modern Christianity is in precisely the same situation as Israel during ancient times. We regard ourselves as Christians who have already been delivered from the “Egypt” of our sinful past. As in the case of Israel, many of the members of Christian churches only have a form of godliness without a testimony of rebirth. They are hangers-on who are far from saved and mostly behave contrary to what the Bible teaches. Some of the others are truly saved but still in the infant phase of their new life of faith. Only a small group is spiritually mature as they are able to testify about sanctification after repentance, and they proceed resolutely by faith to appropriate the promises of the Lord.

The spiritual problems and lack of insight associated with the majority of believers incline them to be overly dependent on religious leaders, and they trust solely in them to inform them on how to live as Christians. Like Israel, they also rely on explorers to survey the road ahead and then advise the people of God on the appropriate way to take. These explorers, the religious leaders, claim that they have the knowledge to correctly advise people on how to reach their spiritual destination. They probe the theological landscape by studying the Bible, offering guidelines on how God’s promises in His Word should be interpreted, compiling doctrines, and suggesting solutions on how crises should be solved. The enormous influence which the teachings of some church fathers like Origen, Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Wesley, and others, have had over the centuries, cannot be underestimated – some of them proclaimed biblical truths while others promoted unbelief and deception.

It is especially in the field of theology where the devil has been very active to deceive millions of people by robbing them spiritually and inducing them to take the wrong road, and this onslaught is becoming more intense. As in the case of Israel, the majority of modern explorers offer completely wrong advice to the people. They do not focus on the salvation of Christ, hence they regard the victorious Canaan life as an unattainable ideal and tell their followers that they are weak people who will never prevail over sin and fleshliness. The enemy is perceived as being too strong for them; consequently, they should reconcile themselves with the idea that they are destined to be wilderness sojourners – nothing more. They have been liberated from Egypt and should be content with their present position. Christians should not strive after the victorious life as that will not be realised.

Do you recognise this type of language which is not only fatalistic but also reveals unbelief in various biblical promises? Such theologians and church fathers undermine the credibility of the Bible as they are mainly inclined towards denial. Not all of them renounce all biblical doctrines, since some of them do recognise the doctrine of salvation as depicted by Israel’s salvation from their Egyptian bondage. However, they are contented with this fact, and deny that there is a further transition to the Promised Land, thereby depriving themselves from a large number of biblical promises. Because of their self-imposed theological limitations they deny the following doctrines and promises in the Bible since they boldly declare: There is no further work of grace related to sanctification and the filling of the Holy Spirit as all Christians

have already received the Holy Spirit in His fullness; there is no such thing as carnal Christians who walk by the flesh; there is no rapture, no personal Antichrist or a literal tribulation of seven years; Israel is no longer God's people, and the restoration of modern Israel has no bearing on the fulfilment of biblical prophecies; the throne of David will not be restored in Jerusalem, and there will not be a thousand-year reign of peace after the second coming of Christ. This group of theological explorers do recognise Jesus as Saviour but they are not Spirit-filled, they do not understand the whole counsel of God, and are completely stuck in the wilderness life with its spiritual poverty and precarious existence. Their knowledge of biblical eschatology is also very scant.

As apostasy increases, the list of theological denials becomes longer and the falling away from the truth increases in extent. The following are new additions to this list, and with these heretical statements the basic foundations of the Christian faith are destroyed (cf. Ps. 11:3): According to modern apostates there is no such thing as rebirth as people are saved in a ritualistic way through baptism; Christ was not born from a virgin; He is not God; His crucifixion was a political act which has no bearing on the forgiveness of sins; He did not rise from the dead and therefore did not ascend to heaven; He is not the only Saviour as there are many other messiahs in the world religions; the Bible is not the inspired and inerrant Word of God; there is no heaven or hell and also no devil; sin is a relative concept and every person can decide for himself what is right and wrong. This group of theological explorers are of the opinion that it was a mistake for Israel to move out of Egypt, thereby confining themselves to a miserable wilderness life. They favour a return to Egypt and the embracing of a multireligious orientation. Religious thinking of this nature represents a transition from a weak faith to no faith at all. According to the Bible, extreme apostatising is the consequence of demonic-inspired deception, and that is particularly characteristic of the end-time shortly before the second coming of Christ (1 Tim. 4:1).

The minority faithful ones

Contrary to the large group of deceived explorers there is a small group of faithful ones who give sound counsel from the Word of God. They do their best to promote faith in the power of God and the truth of His promises. There is in fact a Promised Land to take possession of, and it amounts to unbelief in God if we refuse to accept His promises by faith and to trust Him for full salvation and complete sanctification (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23). Why would He promise a land (or life) to us wherein we can live free from domination by our enemies if it were impossible to achieve victories in His Name? We will spiritually impoverish ourselves beyond measure if we fail to humble ourselves while waiting to be endued with power from on high, as that is the only key to victory over all our enemies.

The two reliable explorers were rejected by Israel, and there were even calls to kill them. It is the same today, and that is the reason why there is so much antagonism and negative emotions among members and leaders of different denominations. Preachers who stand firm on evangelical principles, which include sanctification as a deeper work of grace, are in most cases not popular spiritual leaders. In their exploration of the spiritual landscape they are fully aware of the extensive power of the enemy. However, this awareness does not negatively impact on their view about the road ahead, because they are also aware of a still bigger truth – that is the power of God to fulfil His Word and all His promises to us. He is fully able to render all of us more than conquerors.

The church of the end-time is divided into three different groups. Some of its members only mentally identify with Christianity but they are still in Egypt and not yet redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Another group has already been saved from their sinful past but find themselves in the precarious existence of the wilderness life as they have not yet had the experience of sanctification. Only a smaller, third group find themselves in the Promised Land of a victorious spiritual life. In many cases there are representatives of all three these groups in the same congregation – unsaved members, carnal members, and spiritual members.

A major part of the problem lies with the recipients of religious messages, who are often

subjectively averse to the truth. However, the doctrine of the church to which they belong is equally important in determining the nature of their faith (or lack of it). In the same way in which the explorers sent out by Israel later returned with conflicting ideas, churches today also confront believers with a wide range of diverging and conflicting teachings. Every person must first investigate whether the full truth is proclaimed by a particular church before joining them. Read their confessions of faith and assess the nature of their relationship with the Lord and His Word. What is their view on the Godhead, on salvation, on sanctification, on the Bible itself and also on the second coming of Christ? If there is any reason for concern, also in the way in which the preachers practically express their faith (a tree is known by its fruit), you cannot identify with such church as they will eventually paralyse you spiritually and blind you to the truth.

The same rule also applies to Christian websites on the internet. First read what they say about themselves and about their faith. If you don't do that, you might expose yourself to serious deception and suffer extensive spiritual damage. False teachings are so widespread today that large parts of the traditional Christian world are sinking away in a quagmire of delusion and distorted doctrines. If it becomes evident that a ship is sinking, you should get off that ship as quickly as possible and row away to safety in a lifeboat.

Because of the low spiritual standards which are so prevalent in the world, many of the dedicated Christians pray earnestly to the Lord that He will revive the church – that the spiritual ones among them will again be filled with power from on high to serve the Lord with greater commitment; that the carnal ones will make a complete surrender to experience the victory which the Lord has promised to all of us; and that the unsaved ones will be saved. We live in a time in which those who are unjust become more unjust, but in which those who are holy are called to higher levels of holiness (Rev. 22:11).

Because of the strenuous demands which are imposed upon Christians in the end-time due to more intensive apostatising, children of the Lord should take care that their enthusiasm for the work of the Lord does not dwindle. It is for good reasons that the Lord Jesus warned us against the rising tide of unrighteousness: "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12). We must not, like Peter in the stormy sea at night, become frightened at the sight of the dark and threatening waves, but keep our eyes fixed on Jesus while expecting His coming: "And everyone who has this hope in Him [the second coming of Christ] purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).

While we are waiting on the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom we should make very sure that we are not spiritually wayward and roaming around in the wilderness of a carnal or worldly way of living. To be in the Promised Land in a New Testament sense, implies that we have accepted all the promises of the Lord Jesus on salvation and sanctification, and daily follow Him (1 John 2:6). That will enable us to become mature Christians who prevail over our spiritual enemies. The key to a life of victory and fruitful service is to remain true to our Saviour. John says: "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 1:8-9).

May the Lord help us to abide in the doctrine of Christ by always confessing His deity, power and grace, and to daily increase in His grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18). When we experience more of Him in our hearts, our lives and in our churches, we will be able to more convincingly reach out to carnal Christians who are still on a purposeless journey through a spiritual wilderness, and also to an unsaved world who are the victims of ignorance, unbelief and deception.

3. Victory Over the Flesh

Scripture reading: Ephesians 4:21-32.

The doctrine on sanctification has two distinguishable aspects, i.e. the putting off of the old, sin-inclined nature, and the putting on of the new nature when we are filled by the Holy Spirit. When a Christian fails to make this surrender he finds himself in an inner conflict in which the flesh acts in opposition to the Spirit: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). The uncrucified flesh stands in a Christian's way to serve the Lord with all his heart, and such a person repeatedly grieves and resists the Holy Spirit through his carnal lifestyle – he does not walk in the Spirit but in the flesh.

During the church history of the 18th and 19th centuries, sanctification as a doctrine was foundational in giving rise to revivals in various countries. In our time, the practical experience of holiness, victory over sin and true discipleship is absent in the lives of most Christians. Because of ignorance, slackness or deception, the blessing of a life of spiritual fulfilment eludes the greatest part of the end-time church. Many of the modern churches are prone to superficiality, theological error, carnality and worldliness because of not walking in the Spirit.

Since many of the preachers, theologians and church members are not Spirit-filled, they do not even know what it is to grow up to spiritual maturity, to do Bible study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to be instructed in the deeper things of God's Word (1 Cor. 2:10). Many of them are contented with this situation of fleshliness and spiritual immaturity, while others are trying in vain to make up for their deficiencies by pursuing false revivals based on ecstatic signs and wonders.

A Christian who can testify about regeneration (initial sanctification) should realise that this is only the beginning of a path which leads to spiritual maturity, insight into the Word and serving the Lord (complete sanctification). Such people should strive after increased knowledge and grace in order to be fully equipped for service: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely" (1 Thess. 5:23).

From Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:22-24 it is obvious that a Christian should put off the old man. That is done by denying and crucifying the flesh with all its lusts and sinful habits. Paul mentions various works of the flesh in this chapter, such as lying, anger, wrath, bitterness, evil speaking and stealing. In Ephesians 5:18, drunkenness is added to the list of sins. A person who is guilty of such things grieves the Holy Spirit and cannot claim to lead a Spirit-controlled life. Our command is to put off and overcome the stumbling-block of the flesh by virtue of Christ's victory on the cross. After doing that, we have the opportunity of putting on a life of holiness and fruitfulness in the Lord, and making rapid progress towards spiritual maturity.

The Spirit and the flesh

Romans 8:1 says that we should not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. It demands more than merely changed ideas to switch over from a fleshly to a spiritual form of behaviour. The old man, who was in principle put off when receiving Christ as Saviour should, in an unconditional surrender, be completely given over to be crucified so we can put on the new man without the obstacle of the flesh. The old nature has become established in our lives by the force of habit, and its power should be decisively broken. If we fail to do that, the flesh will retain its influence and stand in our way towards spiritual growth: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be" (Rom. 8:7). It is contrary to its nature to accept the authority of the Spirit.

There is no possibility of the flesh being tamed, ignored or subdued. The Bible says the old man is depraved beyond the point of rehabilitation, and consequently has to die: "... knowing

this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:6). Paul says that he glories in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world was crucified to him and he to the world (Gal. 6:14). Christ did not only die for Paul – Paul also had to die to the sinful world (Rom. 6:6, 11).

Key concepts

The commands towards “putting off” and “putting on” are key concepts in our spiritual life, and they apply to both our regeneration and sanctification. Paul says to the Colossians that the putting off of their old life coincided with the mortification of various sins: “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them” (Col. 3:5-7). They were saved from these sins and should never commit them again.

Paul then proceeds to mention quite a number of fleshly works and inclinations which are still part of Christians’ lives, and should be put off during a complete surrender: “But now [after being saved] you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:8-10).

From this Scripture it is evident that a saved person is still being influenced by a sin-inclined, fleshly nature that should be put off, crucified and conquered. Should a believer fail to take the step of complete surrender, fleshly works such as evil-speaking, intolerance, envy, foul language and lies will still often occur, and that renders strong proof that such a person does not lead a Spirit-controlled life. The same problems of fleshliness also prevailed in other congregations. Paul said to the Corinthians:

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Cor. 3:1-3). In the same chapter he blames them for not even realising that, as children of God, they should live under the full control of the Holy Spirit: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).

It did not even occur to these carnal Christians that the Holy Spirit dwells in them, and that they were committed to holy living. They did not have the correct disposition towards their new lives in Christ. If you are serious about developing a Christian character, you should begin by putting off the old nature. Confess every form of fleshliness, as well as the fleshly state in which you are, and surrender the flesh with its lusts to be crucified. Subsequently, you should consistently uphold the disposition that you have died to the flesh, as that is the only way in which the habitual yielding to wrong inclinations of the past will be broken:

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:11-13). Never allow sin a right of existence in your life by arguing that you are still only a sinner and should make peace with this fact. You will never be delivered from your fleshly state if you adopt this attitude. Christians who fail to seriously address this issue, continue to live under the domination of their old nature with all its weaknesses, and therefore confine themselves to a fleshly state which is characterised by powerlessness, inconsistency and spiritual immaturity.

Growth in holiness

It is extremely important to put off sin and fleshliness and to be cleansed from it, as that will afford the Holy Spirit the opportunity to fill you and take complete control of your life. Thereafter, the nature of Christ can be established in you without the impediment of a carnal heart. It will give you great joy to put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness. Paul says: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts" (Rom. 13:14). It is also a good idea to cultivate specific character traits of Christ, as that will help to gradually conform to His image:

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:12-16). The Lord Jesus is the incarnated Word, and more knowledge of the Word will strengthen your consciousness on who Jesus is.

As we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, holiness will also qualitatively increase in our lives. The renewing work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts must daily continue while we are progressing to higher heights of dedication. Paul said to the Colossians: "[We] do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:9-10). Their objective should be to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12).

Continued struggle against human weaknesses

Why is there a need for this strong and sustained commitment to sanctification after a Christian has already made a complete surrender, has put on the new man and was filled by the Holy Spirit? Is there still fleshliness in us against which we should contend? Yes, the struggle continues and the process of sanctification should be pursued unabated since Spirit-filled children of the Lord can make mistakes and still be tempted to sin. There is even the possibility of backsliding if they fail to commit themselves to their calling of continued growth in holiness.

Although a Christian can be delivered from his depraved, sinful nature, be filled by the Holy Spirit and also walk in the Spirit, he still has a human body with inherent weaknesses such as limited strength, imperfect knowledge, changing emotions, as well as five senses which are points of entry to deception and temptation. In the Bible, the human body is sometimes also described as "flesh", with or without domination by a sinful nature. A Spirit-filled Christian therefore also has a flesh with all its weaknesses and potential to sin, even though he may already have surrendered his sinful nature to be crucified.

As a Christian, the life of Jesus must be manifested in my mortal flesh, or body (2 Cor. 4:11). Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I [the old, sinful Paul] who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh [in my weak human body] I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). The sinful nature of Paul was dead, but as the new man in Christ he still lived in his own human body. Christians also walk in the flesh (bodily), despite the fact that they have mortified their old fleshly nature: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 10:3). We are still in a human body but we do not live under the domination of the fallen human nature, but under the authority of the Spirit.

The weaknesses of our human bodies are not sin per se, but if the Holy Spirit does not help us in our weakness and give us power to avert mistakes and resist sin, we may indeed sin.

The Lord's grace is sufficient to enable us not to sin because of a particular weakness: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16).

The Lord does not sympathise with sin – He has a solution for it, i.e. forgiveness and cleansing. However, He does have sympathy with human weaknesses and is able to help us overcome them. But remember that Spirit-filled Christians can still, because of these typical human weaknesses, commit errors of judgement, lapse into despondency, suffer from proudness, become exhausted and overworked, make impulsive decisions that are not properly considered, lose their self-control under pressure, etc. The Lord assures us that, before His throne of grace, there are solutions to and victory over all these problems.

In view of the weaknesses which are still part of the human body after a complete surrender, the honouring of the command towards holiness should so much the more be accepted as a challenge. If we do that, it will not so often be necessary to make excuses for negligence, carnal behaviour and uncharitable attitudes. Paul says: "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. ... Now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Rom. 6:19, 22).

Now that we are free from the slavery to sin, and in a complete surrender gave the full control of our lives over to the Holy Spirit, there are limitless possibilities of serving the Lord. A living faith is a faith that produces fruit for the kingdom of heaven, and that is the basic meaning of the word "holiness" – set apart for the service of the Lord!

4. The Building of a Spiritual House

Scripture reading: 1 Corinthians 3:9-16

Paul uses the example of the building of a house to demonstrate the two basic aspects of our spiritual life, i.e. justification and sanctification. The foundation is absolutely vital and refers to our salvation: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). He is the rock upon which a wise man’s house is built (Matt. 7:24), and that is why this rock is also described as “the foundation of repentance” (Heb. 6:1). In the Old Testament, David referred to the Lord as his Rock and his Deliverer (2 Sam. 22:2).

Justification is a work of grace which only the Lord Jesus can do for us. Paul says that when we were still sinners we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son (Rom. 5:10). That is a perfect salvation which we must only believe and accept, and that causes us to be born again. The new life which we receive from Christ, can be described as imputed righteousness as it is given to us by grace as a gift without any works or merit on our side. The Lord Jesus only expects from us to turn around on the way of sin (repent), to confess our sins and to receive Him as Saviour – then, the foundation of repentance and a new life in Christ is laid in our lives.

When Paul says that he has laid the foundation, he refers to people whom he has guided to repent and accept Christ as Saviour. That is basic evangelism – leading people to Christ to save them. We must first put our faith in Jesus Christ, through whom we obtain a new, regenerated life, which is our justification before God. During the further building of the house after the foundation of repentance has been laid, we become fellow-workers of God through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. He equips us for service and guides us to lead our lives strictly in accordance with biblical precepts. It is in this sphere where things can go horribly wrong when people rely more on their own strength, insights and ingenuity than on the guidance and empowering of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to please God in this way, and that is why fleshly (carnal) Christians are building with perishable material and will appear before the judgement seat of Christ empty-handed as failed disciples who are indeed saved but made no real spiritual progress after that.

To avoid serious failures of this nature we should not sit back after repentance but earnestly pursue sanctification. Paul says: “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God” (Heb. 6:1). Only doubtful starters are time and again trying to lay the foundation of repentance without progressing from that point. We must commit ourselves to realise the upward call of God in our lives.

Every saved person is commanded to live a holy life by pleasing God in everything he does: “... but as He who has called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15). This is a command which all Christians should heed after conversion, and for that reason this phase of our lives is characterised by collaborative righteousness: “For we are God’s fellow-workers” (1 Cor. 3:9). We must give our full collaboration to realise God’s plan with our lives.

This commitment does not at all imply that we should try to serve the Lord through mere human efforts. No, we cannot sanctify ourselves and truly serve the Lord in our own strength, even though some people think they can. The Lord alone can purify our hearts and fill us with His Holy Spirit. This experience is described as complete sanctification, as opposed to initial sanctification during the first purging of our sins (2 Pet. 1:9). Paul describes this second blessing as follows: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:23-24). It is the Lord who sanctifies us and fills us with His Holy Spirit.

To be able to receive this blessing we must first confess and forsake everything of which the Holy Spirit convicts us, including the carnal state in which we still are after conversion. The old, sinful nature of man has been established through the force of habit, and opposes the Holy Spirit who regenerated us: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). If we refuse to make a full surrender in order to overcome the flesh and its lusts, we will continuously build upon the foundation of repentance with wood, hay and straw. That is the reason why, in the process of sanctification, it is expected of us to fully put off the old man who was in principle crucified at conversion but still retains a large degree of control over us. Its dominance should be broken.

Paul tells the Ephesians and the Colossians that they should put off the old man and put on the new man which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10). He reminds the Galatians that in spite of the fact that they walked out of their old life at conversion, those principles and inclinations that were established through the force of habit, are still able to determine their actions. There is only one solution to this problem and that is a further surrender to fully put off the flesh, to commit your entire life to the control of the Holy Spirit and to walk in the Spirit: "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another" (Gal. 5:24-26). After conversion we must make concrete choices with a view to holiness and victory over the flesh and its depraved habits.

Christians can certainly grieve the Holy Spirit if they continue allowing the flesh and its sinful inclinations to retain its grip upon their lives. They must realise that they cannot fully put on the new nature of Christ before laying aside all spiritual stumbling-blocks. Every person has his own propensities and weaknesses of which the indwelling Holy Spirit will convict him. One of the revival preachers, Charles Finney, suggested that we handle this problem in a very practical way by compiling a list of the sins, weaknesses, and other problems of which the Holy Spirit convicts us. Work through the list and settle your case with the Lord. Also reconcile yourself to all the people whom you have harmed in any way. Forgive those who have trespassed against you, as in this way you can overcome evil with good and prevent a root of bitterness from springing up in your heart.

Can you see that during a complete surrender we should again do honest soul-searching and put off everything which grieves the Holy Spirit? Without complying with this condition, holiness will never be experienced as a practical reality in our lives. We do have the promise of holiness but we have to take specific steps to ensure its realisation: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Our hearts must first be cleansed before the Spirit of God will fill and control them.

As far as the process of sanctification after a complete surrender is concerned, we should realise that we are involved in a lifelong process of growth to more holiness and greater Christlikeness. We will never reach the ideal of perfection but should nevertheless pursue it. Paul says: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (Phil. 3:12). Furthermore, we should be mindful of the fact that as long as we are in a human body there is always the possibility of fleshly actions. Although we are no longer in a fleshly state we can still be tempted to act in a carnal way and then sin due to our human weaknesses.

A potentially dangerous situation of backsliding arises when a Spirit-filled Christian neglects his duty to immediately confess and forsake his sins, as that would allow the flesh to again achieve a certain degree of control over that person. Furthermore, we should earnestly

counsel fellow Christians when it becomes evident that one or other sin has gained control over them: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). “Let him who think he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). We should daily take up our cross by whom the world has been crucified to us, and we to the world (Luke 9:23; Gal. 6:14). In this way it can be ensured that not only individual Christians persevere on the narrow way, but that congregations also remain spiritually healthy and fulfil their calling to be instruments in the hands of the Lord to let the light of the gospel shine in a dark world.

What happens when believers fail to heed the command towards holiness? They would then allow the sinful nature of the flesh to continue with its work of spiritually paralysing them. The flesh will lust against the Spirit, thereby effectively impeding the spiritual growth of the person and depriving him from boldness to serve the Lord. Such persons are usually the cause of many problems in a congregation, and that was exactly the problem which Paul had with the church in Corinth. They were so fleshly that they continuously demonstrated a spirit of envy, strife and divisions, always lacking the insight to appreciate good spiritual instruction (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

The more there are of these immature, fleshly Christians in a congregation, the lower the spiritual standard and the more crucial the need for sanctification, revival and spiritual growth. Paul was greatly concerned over the spiritual situation in the congregation. He asked them if they did not know that they were a temple of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells. It was with a view to this problem that he said each one should take heed how he builds upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. Fleshly members who build with wood, hay and stubble, i.e. perishable things that have no spiritual value, will appear before the judgement seat of Christ as failed disciples – with empty hands, yet so as through fire.

Dr. Andrew Murray also warns against a fruitless spiritual life: “As long as we fail to subject ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the flesh will have dominance over us.” Dr. John Rice, a former American revivalist, encountered problems related to fleshliness in various churches, and said the following on the importance of sanctification and the filling of the Holy Spirit:

“I want to remind you again that to be filled with the Holy Spirit is commanded. This is not to be left up to your judgment. Anyone who is not filled with the Holy Spirit just is not in the will of God. Anyone who is not filled with the Holy Spirit is living a life of disobedience, a life more or less of fruitlessness. The reason you are not winning souls is that you are disobedient, is that you are not seeking and not having upon you the fullness of the Spirit of God.

“We preachers, God forgive us preachers – I am for the preachers; I do not mean to be critical of them – do you know what is wrong with us preachers? We have nearly everything in the world; we have good training; we have degrees; we have good organization; we have good literature; we have good equipment; we have everything except the important thing, that is, the power of God!

“You have churches that are filled with everything else but the Holy Ghost. That is the trouble. Your children are going to Hell because you are not filled with the Holy Ghost. You talk to people; it does not do any good. Why? Because you are not filled with the Holy Spirit. Year in and year out Sunday School teachers have unsaved children in their classes but never get them saved. Why? Because they are not filled with the Holy Ghost. Your own children grow up to the years of accountability, and year in and year out you never win them. Why? Because you are not filled with the Holy Ghost.

“Are you filled with the Holy Ghost? I wonder how many here are contented with the life you are now living. Are you contented to go through life and never win a soul? Do you want to be

filled with the Holy Spirit? If you really want to, God's conditions must be met. One of them is obedience. ... Are you ready to lay self on the altar, count self dead, crucified? And when self is crucified, will you come and follow Jesus, do what He says about soul winning? That is the kind of obedience the Bible is talking about. If you are not setting out to win souls with a holy passion, you do not mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You may want some ecstasy, but you do not want what God wants to give you. You are not going to have it unless you are after what God is after, and that is the conversion of sinners and the power of God to witness to them" (source: *Fullness of the Spirit*, by John Rice).

The provision of divine power for spiritual service is clearly stated: the Holy Spirit was poured out 2 000 years ago on the day of Pentecost with the purpose of convicting people of their sin and saving them, but also to endue believers with power from on high to prevail over sin, the flesh and the world, so they can be effective witnesses for Christ in the evangelisation of the unsaved world. The more Spirit-filled children of God there are, the more evangelistic and missionary work is done, and the more prayers will go up for the spiritual awakening of half-hearted, fleshly and worldly church members who are still uninvolved in the work of the Lord on earth. In answer to these prayers the Lord works mightily in the hearts of those who are being prayed for.

It was Paul's expectation that the young Jewish converts would soon grow up in holiness and the knowledge of the Lord, thereby equipping them to go out themselves and preach the gospel to their fellow-countrymen. However, he was disappointed in them because the converts did not make progress in pursuing the blessing of sanctification, and consequently remained in the infant stage of their life of faith. Because of this lack of growth their spiritual discernment was poor, and Paul blamed them for this deficiency: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection" (Heb. 5:12-6:1).

There should be growth and progress so young Christians can become mature, able to help those who are not yet on the way, or only at an early stage of their spiritual journey. The fact is that definite steps must be taken to not only preach salvation but to also provide for the needs of the newly-converted to be established in holiness. The "babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1) cannot be left to their own fate on the presumption that they will of themselves find the way to spiritual fulfilment. They are still ignorant of this promise and need to be spiritually instructed on it.

More than a century ago, Andrew Murray was at the forefront of a revival ministry in South Africa. He always followed up basic evangelisation with clear preaching on the filling of the Holy Spirit. His books on sanctification as a further work of grace after repentance are still read today in many countries.

Other well-known revivalists from the 18th and 19th centuries followed the same approach. John Wesley's converts gathered in halls where they were instructed on higher levels of dedication to the Lord. Eventually there were more than 500 such groups, and that was the beginning of a new church that would proclaim the message of holiness far and wide. In America, D.L. Moody was also a well-known evangelist. After conducting evangelistic rallies in places where many people received Christ as Saviour, the rallies were followed up by sermons on sanctification. Dr. R.A. Torrey, who later became the principal of the Moody Bible Institute, was often requested to offer a week-long series on sanctification after Moody's initial rallies. These sermons were later published and also translated into many languages. This book is titled: "The Holy Spirit: Who He is and what He does".

From all these examples it is obvious that evangelistic work should be followed up by systematic biblical instruction to alert converts not to stagnate by failing to pursue their calling as disciples. Care should be taken to ensure that all who have a testimony of justification are also able to testify about sanctification. Then alone, lasting and enduring work will be done in the expansion of God's kingdom on earth.

Only those who are able to testify about sanctification are building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ with gold, silver and precious stones. Those who persevere in their fleshliness are building with wood, hay and straw, and spend their lives in the pursuit of vain interests which have no value for the kingdom of God. It is not a matter of course that every saved person will necessarily build upon the foundation of his repentance with the right material. Many of them fail to do so, and because of that their human works will be rejected and they will stand before the Lord empty-handed – only just saved, and nothing more. Such believers are able to testify about salvation but not about sanctification.

Carnal Christians are not mindful of their calling to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this ignorance they feel quite comfortable in the company of worldly people and are not striving after the deeper things of God. There is no progress in their spiritual life. To those who have already made the commitment towards holiness, the message is extended that there are higher heights to reach out for. The Lord wishes to continue with His work of purification in our lives so we can bear more fruit – not only thirtyfold, but also sixtyfold and hundredfold. The good seed of the Word which has been sown in a pure heart will yield much fruit for the expansion of Christ's kingdom on earth. He calls all believers to be part of the gathering of this harvest.

5. Keep Your Spiritual Record Clean

Scripture reading: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

Two of the important capacities (or “offices”) in which the Lord Jesus reveals Himself to us are those of Saviour and Advocate. These roles relate to our initial salvation as well as our subsequent cleansing from sin, which is an ongoing process. The following are the most significant functions associated with the two capacities:

Salvation

We should have a clear understanding of the fact that all people are sinners who deserve the death penalty (Rom. 5:12). This fact was clearly conveyed to Israel: “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). The same principle also applies in the New Testament: “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). The death penalty upon sinners was never repealed but through the substitutionary death of Christ He served this penalty for the redemption of all who put their trust in Him as their Saviour: “God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). The innocent Son of God died for all the guilty sinners to save them: “He was wounded for our transgressions. ... The chastisement for our peace was upon Him” (Isa. 53:5).

The moment when Christ died on the cross He uttered a highly significant dying word, *tetelestai* (*it is finished, or the price is fully paid* – John 19:30). The word *tetelestai* was more meaningful to people of the first century than to us today, and we will do well to retrieve its original meaning in order to fully understand what Christ had said. In modern languages there is not a suitable synonym for this word; consequently, much of its meaning has been lost. In biblical times, the word *tetelestai* was used as the first word on a receipt. It therefore conveyed the meaning of *fully paid*. In some cases, an account was merely cancelled by writing across it: *tetelestai*.

Paul reminded the Christian church in Corinth of this truth when he said: “For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). Peter said: “... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The testimony of the elders in heaven confirms their full realisation that they have been bought with the blood of the Lamb, when they sing: “You were slain (sacrificed) and with Your blood You purchased men unto God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9 AB).

During biblical times it was common practice to nail the charge-sheet of a prisoner to his cell-door. The offences for which he was convicted were written on the charge-sheet, as well as the penalty imposed upon him. After serving his sentence, the charge-sheet was removed from the door and cancelled by writing across it in big letters: *Tetelestai* (Fully served). It was then given to him and nobody could ever charge him again for these offences. He had paid the price for his trespasses in full by serving the entire sentence.

In a spiritual sense all human beings are captives of Satan, “for all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). They find themselves in his death cells awaiting their trial before the great white throne where they will be condemned to eternal death. The prison master is the devil and no person can, of his own accord, liberate himself from this severe bondage or from the death sentence imposed upon him. To save lost sinners, Jesus Christ willingly served the death sentence that has already in principle been imposed upon all sinners (Rom. 6:23). After His resurrection

from the dead, He is in a position to cancel the charge-sheet of every lost sinner by writing in red letters with His blood across it: *Tetelestai* – Sentence served.

Paul says: “You were dead in sins, and your sinful desires were not yet cut away. Then He gave you a share in the very life of Christ, for He forgave all your sins, and blotted out the charges proved against you, the list of his commandments which you had not obeyed. He took this list of sins and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross” (Col. 2:13-14 *LB*). The penalty for all our sins was fully paid on the cross.

Have all the sins of which the devil accuses you before the throne of God been blotted out by the blood of the Lamb? If so, nobody can ever again accuse you for those sins, no matter how serious they were, because the sentence for them has been fully served. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free” (Gal. 5:1).

Continued cleansing

There are specific conditions to which we must comply if we wish to keep our lives pure before the Lord. John says: “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Considering the continuous tense of the verb, this scripture may be paraphrased as follows: “If we keep on walking in the light as He is in the light, we will have uninterrupted fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son will always cleanse us from all sin.”

This is a very important guideline for our life after repentance. We should walk in the light of the Lord Jesus’ presence. That means that we must abide in Him and not wander away from Him. He is the incarnate Word, and through diligently studying the Word we can ensure that we always remain in touch with Him. Paul says: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (Col. 3:16). If we honour the Word we will not sin. The psalmist says: “Your word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11).

Our objective should be to refrain from sinning. Because of our human fallibility we can indeed sin, but in such cases the problem must immediately be addressed: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Sin contaminates our life and we need to be cleansed from it as soon as possible: “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

John describes the process of continued cleansing from sin by explaining Christ’s role as the heavenly Advocate who acts on our behalf whenever the devil accuses us: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1-2). By virtue of His atoning death He nullifies all accusations.

Christians should nevertheless be mindful of the fact that Satan never stops accusing them before the throne of God when they sin. In Revelation 12:10, the devil is described as “the accuser of our brethren, who accuses them before our God day and night.” When he accuses us, Jesus Christ acts as our Advocate to reject these accusations, on condition that we abide in Him and our relationship with Him remains undisturbed.

The Lord Jesus intercedes for us and also defends us whenever we are charged before the Father. The Amplified Bible says: “But if anyone should sin, we have an Advocate (One Who will intercede for us) with the Father; it is Jesus Christ the all righteous.” The NIV says: “But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ the Righteous One.” However, to enjoy the privilege of an Advocate who intercedes for us we should daily walk in the light and always confess and forsake all sins of which the Holy Spirit convicts us. We must live in the atonement – then alone, Satan’s accusations will be rejected.

Wilful and continuous sinning

What happens in the case of wilful and persistent sinning into which some of God's children may regress? Will the heavenly Advocate also defend such contraveners? Definitely not, since these sins are not confessed and forsaken but instead committed deliberately and repetitively. The person concerned again comes under the power and condemnation of sin, and during the course of time a wall of sin arises which separates him from God.

Because of this state of affairs, the person backslides spiritually and not only grieves the Holy Spirit by his sin but also resists Him by refusing to confess and forsake his sins. Gradually, sin (and also the devil) gains a larger measure of control over the person's life, thereby also opening the way for other sins to enter in. Such deliberate sins have devastating effects on a believer's life: "For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for our sins" (Heb. 10:26).

The wilfulness or intent which manifests in such cases is an indication that, in conflict with his own conscience and also the dictates of God's Word, the person was moved by the influence of deception to continue with his sin. He therefore does not comply with the Lord's condition of confession and repentance in order to be forgiven and cleansed from these sins.

Such Christians may get involved with sins such as extra-marital relations, corruption, gambling, love of money, greediness, pride, as well as different forms of spiritual deception which are pleasing to their carnal nature. They again allow the sinful flesh to gain a foothold in their lives, and after a time it becomes a dominant and intimidating power in their lives.

King David also became entangled in wilful and intentional sins. He coveted his neighbour's wife, while the law of the Lord clearly prohibits such actions. He also committed murder to get rid of her husband, while the Lord's law strictly condemns it. When the Lord sternly rebuked him because of his sin, David immediately showed remorse and agreed that he was in big trouble. He realised that, as the anointed of the Lord, he had fallen into sin; consequently, his heart became impure and his spirit wavered by yielding to sinful temptations. He was clearly aware of the fact that should this state of affairs persist the Lord could even take His Holy Spirit away from him. David humbled himself and confessed his sins as follows to the Lord:

"Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight. ... Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit" (Ps. 51:4-12).

How much more is it incumbent on us to avert situations of yielding to sinful lusts! Paul warns believing but backsliding Hebrews that sin has the ability to harden a person's heart and render him spiritually blunt and insensible, and for that reason Christians should be warned against it: "... but exhort one another daily ... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13).

Backsliders

The phenomenon of an increasing number of backsliders is a big tragedy in Christianity. There was a time in these people's lives when, as the redeemed of the Lord, they were liberated from Satan's captivity. By faith, they had received the cancelled charge-sheet of their previous sins, on which it is written: *tetelestai* (*fully paid*). They subsequently walked in the light for a time and experienced the continued cleansing from sin. Their record remained clean, and sins were immediately confessed and discontinued when the Holy Spirit convicted them of their wrongs. But then they experienced one or other temptation to which they gradually started yielding. It may have been a sudden lust for riches, a wrong relationship, or even doubt or unbelief on certain attributes or promises of God in His Word.

It suits many people to ignore the Bible, taking charge of their own lives, and then to walk according to their own desires and intents. A mind-shift of this nature occurs slowly and almost unnoticed. Bit by bit, day by day, the sinful thought or resolve becomes established in their hearts. They know that it is wrong, but the thought gradually becomes more appealing and for that reason they neglect their duty to subject it to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). In this way they do not only grieve the Holy Spirit but openly resist Him, thereby making room for the particular sin to become entrenched in their lives.

While this process is allowed to take its course, the person's conscience accuses him about the intended sin from which the Holy Spirit wishes to lead him away. Should he persist to accommodate the sinful idea, he will cool down spiritually, his prayers will become shorter and more superficial, and he will be in a hurry to get away from spiritual meetings. The frequently trodden path to the Advocate's throne of grace is increasingly neglected and the person starts wandering away from the Lord. In the spiritual climate in which he now finds himself he pursues other priorities and makes plans to adapt his lifestyle accordingly.

By succumbing to sinful intentions they gradually become established as sinful practices. All forms of sinful behaviour are habitual, which explains why they develop into strongholds of sin which reduce their victims to the level of slaves who have little or no willpower. The intensity of the sin increases and eventually it controls a person's whole life. The drinker drinks more and more, until liquor ultimately destroys his whole life. The gambler keeps on gambling until bankruptcy is inevitable. The spiritually deceived justifies further forms of deception which ultimately give rise to a wall of doctrinal deception between Him and the truth. Apart from the fact that these sins increase in severity, one sin also attracts other sins.

The process of apostatising which started with a single sinful thought or lust which was not resisted, ends in tragedy. James says: "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (Jas. 1:14-15).

New entries are made on the spiritual charge-sheets of these backsliders, which means that they have again become condemned sinners. Most of them would deny their subservience to sin and keep on maintaining an outward form of godliness. They usually argue that all people are sinners and that the sins which they still commit will be forgiven one day.

However, sins must be forgiven here and now, during our earthly lives. The charge-sheets which condemn us must be confessed and nailed to the cross now. We will not be cleansed from sin when we appear before the judgement seat of Christ after the rapture. On that occasion we will only receive awards for works which have true spiritual value in God's kingdom, and which were done when we lived under the atonement of Christ.

Should a Christian again become a slave of sin during his earthly life, he will definitely miss the kingdom of heaven. Paul addressed the following stern warning to the church in Corinth, in which there were also backsliders: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Sinners are not going to heaven. Spiritual Corinthians who walked in the light and persisted in the atonement will certainly go to heaven. They *were* sinners – past tense – but were subsequently washed and cleansed from their sins. What happens to those who again revert to their former sins? If they are not again delivered from these sins they will be lost. Peter says the following about such backsliders:

“They have forsaken the right way and gone astray. ... For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Pet. 2:15, 20-21).

The lost son found himself in this situation. He would have landed in hell if he did not firmly resolve to repent from his sinful ways and return to his Father. In his backslidden state the son was spiritually “dead” and “lost” (Luke 15:32). However, he repented and turned back home to restore his broken relationship with his father: “I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you” (Luke 15:18). He was fully restored to his former place in the house of the Father from where he had wandered away. His new wave of sins was forgiven and his charge-sheet again destroyed.

The message is clear: every person on earth needs a Saviour to blot out his sins, thereby giving him access to the kingdom of heaven. Even if he again sins after he repented, thereby allowing Satan to level fresh charges against him in the heavenly court, he must ensure that Christ as his Advocate will intercede on his behalf. In order to remain fully secure he must daily maintain the right relationship with the Lord Jesus, thereby enjoying the continued cleansing by His blood.

Unfortunately, many former Christians find themselves among the increasing number of spiritually shipwrecked persons who departed from the faith. Paul says that we should have “faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck” (1 Tim. 1:19; 4:1). Such rebellious members of the church who fell into sin, should be admonished and again called to repentance, “if perhaps God will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:25-26). What happens to backsliders who do not repent from this apostatised condition?

“But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die” (Ezek. 18:24). However, that is not necessary since Jesus Christ is still prepared to forgive sins by writing *tetelestai* across any new entries on our charge-sheet of sin (Isa. 55:6-7).

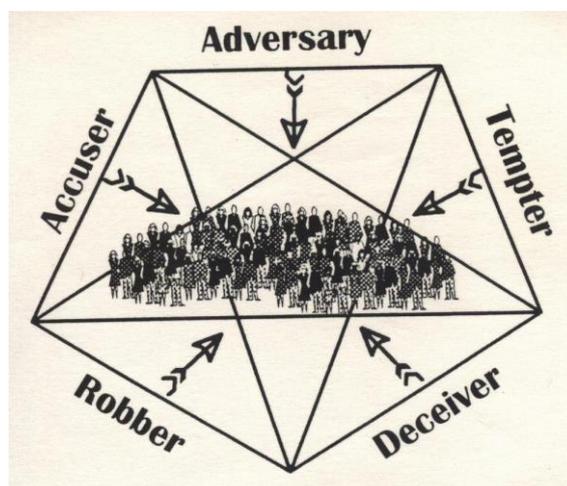
We should always have confidence to approach the throne of grace along the way which the Lord Jesus has prepared for us (Heb. 10:19-22). Our Saviour is also our Advocate who talks to the Father in our defence, and He has promised that those who come to Him will by no means be cast out (John 6:37). You don't have to make an appointment before going to Him; neither do you have to pay anything because He has already paid the full price for every sin. All you need to do is to confess your sins, turn your back on them, and by faith accept the forgiveness which is offered to you.

6. Spiritual Warfare

Scripture reading: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day...” (Eph. 6:10-13).

In the light of the phenomenal influence which Satan and his demons wield upon human lives it is immensely important how we handle this problem to ward off the attacks against us and to gain victory in the struggle. The Lord gave us various commands in His Word on how to defend ourselves, e.g. to give no place to the devil (Eph. 4:27), that we should resist him, his temptations and efforts to deceive us through his collaborators (Jas. 4:7; Matt. 24:4), that we should be aware of the spiritual battle in which are engaged, in which spiritual weapons are to be used (1 Pet. 5:8-9; 2 Cor. 10:3-5), and that we should be like able soldiers who take up the whole armour of God. All these commands are only possible after we were empowered by the Holy Spirit to fight the good fight of faith (Acts 1:8; Eph. 6:10-11; 1 Tim. 6:12).

The armour of God is standard equipment for all believers in the war against our common enemy. Paul does not refer to special equipment which is only meant for those who are involved in deliverance ministries. He has in mind the ordinary, everyday battle of the believer. Although this is a spiritual war, it is nevertheless a very real struggle against a fierce enemy. The comprehensive nature of the spiritual battle is evident from the fact that it is waged from five fronts against believers. In every case the enemy takes on a different guise and uses different strategies to conduct his deception and subversion. In the five capacities the devil or one of his many cronies appear as adversary, tempter, deceiver, robber or accuser.



On each of these five fronts we should be able to correctly identify the image and methods of the enemy in order to be able to successfully resist him.

Adversary

In the first and most obvious instance the devil is described as the Christian’s adversary who is bent on his ruin or detriment in every area of his life: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

This position of confrontation is unavoidable: the devil is our adversary who opposes us in every possible way and also places stumbling-blocks on our way. Our command is to resist him in faith and in so doing also to become his adversary. We should not shut our eyes to

encounters of this nature by arguing them away. Many people ascribe such problems or experiences to negative circumstances or other causes, and fail to recognise the role of the enemy of their souls. Such people do not pursue spiritual solutions to their problems. They hope for the best and accept defeat in a fatalistic way but remain losers in the battle.

The intensity of Satan's opposition knows no bounds because, as a murderer, he is committed to killing people. Wars, disasters, accidents, incitement to suicide, and various other means are employed by him to give vent to his aggression and murderousness. He does not have unlimited powers over people, however, from within the boundaries of his restrictions, he relentlessly pursues his objectives. In addition to sudden, violent attacks, he also uses an array of slower methods to achieve his purpose. Many people's lives are ruined over a long period by being enslaved to liquor, tobacco, drugs, sexual perversions and various other addictions.

Countless problems, obstacles, disappointments and irritations are employed by Satan to discourage Christians, to persuade them to abandon their efforts in the service of the Lord, and to descend into a dark pit of depression. Among such problems are conflicts between family members, friends, colleagues, and others. The harsh and incessant criticism of those who hold different religious or ideological convictions may also give rise to despondency. Often this leads them to accept defeat by burying their differences and by no longer contending for the truth, in an attempt to maintain good relations and to lessen animosity.

The devil can also launch attacks on your economic interests and material possessions in order to harm and impoverish you, and break down your morale. All the multiple ways in which he can attack you, whether they be through people or through circumstances, should be resisted in the name of the Lord and the battle against him should be continued. Never acknowledge defeat, but endure and remain steadfast in your faith. Follow the example of the Lord Jesus, who never succumbed to the pressure against Him: "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin" (Heb. 12:3-4).

Tempter

The devil tempts people to commit moral sins by enticing them through their fleshly lusts. Due to the fallen nature of humanity, which is the result of our first parents having been deceived by the devil, "the heart is deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9) and is inclined towards sinning. Examples of immoral deeds are adultery, gluttony, drunkenness, vindictiveness, murder, corruption, theft, gambling, bearing false witness, and covetousness.

The solution against sins emerging from fleshly lusts is vigilance, self-control and prayer: "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). Do not yield to temptations, but submit yourself to the Lord and resist the devil. The Lord Jesus will understand your problem, and is also able to help you because He Himself experienced and overcame temptations (Heb. 2:18; 4:15-16).

We are also repeatedly admonished to deny ourselves and crucify the old nature, lest we be an open target to moral sins (Luke 9:23; Gal. 6:14). If we fail to surrender the old nature to be crucified, victory over temptations will continue to elude us.

Deceiver

Another guise in which Satan fights against believers is that of deceiver. This refers to religious deception. He exploits people's ignorance and presents them with all sorts of religious lies in order to lead them astray. Apostatising is the inevitable consequence of this deception: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). In the end-time, the spirit of error will be particularly active by deceiving humanity into honouring and following the

Antichrist and his false prophets: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many" (Matt. 24:4-5).

Peter says: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

Destructive heresies are introduced into various theological faculties of prominent universities, by which future pastors are already being deceived during their student years. It is presently a common phenomenon that the virgin birth and deity of Jesus, His resurrection from the dead and the promise of His second coming, as well as the divine inspiration of the Bible, are openly and blatantly denied by a large number of theologians. Another lie which is often heard is that all religions are worshipping the same God, and are therefore awaiting the same world messiah. This lie also comes from the father of all lies, and is used to prepare the way for the coming of the Antichrist as the universal messiah of all faiths.

A lack of knowledge of what the Scriptures say is the breeding-ground for religious deception. However, it is not necessary to live in ignorance since the full truth on spiritual matters has been revealed in the Bible: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). If we would only allow Him, the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth and also proclaim to us the things to come (John 16:13).

Robber

It is one of the most important strategies of Satan to rob Christians. He is intent on impoverishing them spiritually as well as materially. Instead of believers growing up to become fully mature in their faith and consequently strong in the Lord, he tries to thwart this process by rendering them embittered and disheartened, thereby inducing them to backslide: "...looking diligently lest anyone should fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up should cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Heb. 12:15). When the devil robs you of your spiritual peace and weakens your faith, you may become embittered against your circumstances, towards other people and even towards God. This disposition may cause you to backslide, to discontinue your spiritual ministry, and also to lose the rewards of faith which, according to 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Revelation 22:12, you could have received for a dedicated life of service to the Lord: "Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Rev. 3:11; cf. Rev. 2:25).

John also warns that we should be on the lookout for the robber who will do everything possible to rob us of our reward: "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward" (2 John v. 8). Apart from the spiritual damage which the Robber can cause, he is also out to rob you of your money, possessions, health and many other things. He knows that when he succeeds in doing so, you will be restricted in the extent to which you can serve the Lord and provide financial support to His work on earth. The devil is indeed a thief who is committed to breaking in and stealing in order to rob people in various ways of their possessions and heritage. The Lord Jesus said: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Are you alert against the cunning strategies and clever schemes of the Robber? Are you mindful of the damage which he can cause to us if we do not live vigilant and conscientious lives? If you follow a permissive and careless lifestyle by leaving a backdoor or window open to the Robber, he will enter in and cause havoc in your personal life, your household, your marriage and your work. This may cost you dearly, causing you to end up in a wilderness of defeat and despondency.

Accuser

One of the important activities of Satan is that he acts as accuser in the spiritual war which he wages against Christians. He accuses Christians at the throne of God after he has successfully tempted or deceived them, and then demands a degree of control over them. The devil also accuses Christians before unsaved, secular authorities to which Paul refers as “this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4). Lastly, he also accuses them in their own circles in an effort to sow seeds of discord and disunity among the brethren by driving in wedges between them. Resist all incitements of this nature and guard the peace and unity among the true brethren in Christ, “bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (Col. 3:13).

Spiritual Weapons

We are commanded to make use of the weapons that God has provided for us in the battle against Satan and all his evil devices. It is not at all necessary to be spiritually defeated or forced into retreat: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4). There is an arsenal of at least five weapons in the armoury of light which are available to us for the waging of spiritual warfare. We should not only be fully aware of these weapons but also become skilled in their use:

Faith

Our relationship of faith with the Lord should be very strong and unshakable to ensure that we will put our trust in Him under all circumstances, to make us more than conquerors in the Lord Jesus. We must know and believe that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). Without faith in the Conqueror we are defenceless in the battle against sin and unrighteousness. The following scriptures underscore the fact that we are in a spiritual battle in which faith in the Lord is a strong and victorious weapon against the evil one and all his plans:

- “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5). If you believe that Jesus is the King in God’s kingdom, that He conquered sin and death on the cross, that He will defeat the Antichrist and his world powers in the battle of Armageddon, that He will incarcerate the devil and his fallen angels in a pit and then establish His thousand-year reign of peace on earth, then you have to believe that He will also now, in the heat of the battle, strengthen you to gain victory over all the attacks of the enemy. He is the Conqueror, and as one of His faithful followers you can also share in His victory against the powers of darkness. We should not be people of little faith who easily become fearful and start doubting when the battle increases in intensity (Matt. 8:25-27).
- “... taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph. 6:16). In the present dispensation we are waging a spiritual war in which thoughts and ideas play a major role. When Satan sends out his evil thoughts and suggestions to you, you should immediately take shelter behind the shield of your faith in the true God, as that will prevent the evil thoughts from penetrating your defence and establishing themselves in your heart and mind: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7). Stand firm on God’s promises in His Word and meditate on them, then the evil thought will flee from you.
- “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Knowledge of the strategies employed by the enemy is an important part of the spiritual war. How can we resist him if we fail to discern his plans and methods? Obviously, everything which is inconsistent with the Christian faith may be described as bad, evil and subversive, and therefore part of Satan’s attacks against you, your Christian convictions and your interests

as a believer. Paul says: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:11).

- “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12). The battle of faith has many facets and different weapons which can be used, and we must be able and dedicated soldiers for Christ. The firm foundations of our faith, Christ’s victory on the cross, the sword of the Spirit, the power of prayer, and the boldness to testify about these great truths, all form part of the good fight of faith.

Engage in the spiritual battle. If you do not quench the fiery darts of the wicked one with the shield of your faith in Christ, you are an open target to the delusive and immoral ideas which the devil sends out to you. Make sure that you have a working knowledge of the Bible as that is your sword, i.e. your defence against all the lies and sinful ideas. Keep personal contact with the Lord Jesus through prayer, always rely on the victory on the cross, and keep on strengthening your faith (Eph. 6:10).

The Blood of the Lamb

It is important that our spiritual protection and victory should be based upon the shed blood of the Lamb! He died on the cross, “that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

The blood of Jesus which He shed on the cross when He laid down His life has power over all the temptations and schemes of Satan. It can cleanse us from sin by breaking all its bonds: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).

During the coming great tribulation when the devil will come down to earth with great wrath knowing that he has but a short time (Rev. 12:12), the tribulation saints will all die physically as martyrs, but they will overcome the Antichrist by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11). Do you seek spiritual protection under the blood of Christ when the devil attacks you, and do you also pray for this protection over your loved ones as well as others for whom you intercede? They are all desperately in need of spiritual protection. The blood of Christ, which is the symbol of His atoning death, gives life (John 6:53-56), it cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7), and ensures victory in the battle against the evil one (Rev. 12:11).

Christian Testimony

Identifying ourselves fully with the victory of Jesus on the cross and waiting on the Lord to fill us with His Holy Spirit, gives us confidence to openly witness to other people, to resist the devil, and also the willingness to suffer for Christ: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Rev. 12:11; cf. Heb. 10:35, 13:13; Matt. 5:14-16). We have a clear command to be witnesses to the Lord Jesus in an agnostic and apostate world (John 20:21; Acts 1:8). In this way many victories have been achieved for the cross, leading to the powerful expansion of God’s kingdom in many parts of the world. Without Christian witness and preaching, millions of people would still have lived in spiritual darkness, with their minds being blinded by the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4).

Prayer

A prayerless Christian is a powerless Christian. Intercession according to the will of God, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, can really change things. It moves the mighty arm of God and brings many blessings to people: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas. 5:16). Prayer operates in association with faith: “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like the wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (Jas. 1:6-7).

To pray prevailing prayers, we should “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22). We should live holy lives and pray in accordance with the will of God: “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14).

When we draw near to the throne of grace and subject ourselves in prayer to the grace and omnipotence of God, the devil will flee from us: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7).

If we ignore the attacks of the devil, simply shrug them off as an illusion, or try to ward them off by merely resorting to psychological or medical therapy, the problems will become more deeply entrenched, which will have even more serious consequences. If we take refuge in the Lord by taking our burdens to Him in prayer, and also ask others to intercede for us, He will certainly deliver us from evil: “...the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Pet. 2:9). The devil will return again later, but then we should know where our strength is: “...be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10). The victory belongs to Him who is mighty to save (Ps. 34:15; 46:1; 65:2).

The Word

The Word of God is a mighty weapon in the battle against temptation, deception, unbelief, and other attacks that the enemy may launch against us. To be able to use it we must believe it and have a good knowledge of it: “And take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). It is a living and powerful word which penetrates deep into my heart to do its conviction there: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

The Bible is the final authority for truth, and in terms of its precepts all thoughts can be judged as good or evil. Because the Word is like a sword that pierces the depths of my soul, it is able to fully reveal the true nature of my thoughts and intentions. It works in conjunction with my conscience to show me what is right and wrong.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a dynamic power to salvation for everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). It has the ability to deliver every unsaved sinner who truly believes in it, from the power of Satan. The Word has an authority and power which is guaranteed by God Himself by virtue of Christ’s victory on the cross: “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20). Make sure that you experience the liberating power of the Word every day, and that you walk in its light: “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32).

Are your footsteps anchored in God’s Word? “Direct my steps by Your Word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me” (Ps. 119:133). We can be more than conquerors in the battle against the powers of darkness if we do not deviate to the right or to the left from the narrow path of the Lord. Delight yourself in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart (Ps. 37:4).

7. The Typology of Abraham and his Family

Scripture reading: “Just as Abraham believed in God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Therefore, know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, In you all the nations shall be blessed. So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham” (Gal. 3:6-9).

It is remarkable that such a major part of Genesis is devoted to a narrative of Abraham and his family. Why are they so important to us? This is a very special family which typologically alludes to the family of God, and for this reason believers from Israel and the Gentiles can identify with this family and learn much from their experiences. The five key persons in this extended family all represent a person, or groups of persons, who are part of God’s family: Abraham is a type of the Father, his wife Sarah typifies the people of Israel, his son Isaac is a type of Jesus as the Son of God, Isaac’s wife, Rebekah, represents the bride (or church) of Christ, while Abraham’s servant, Eliezer, refers to the Person and role of the Holy Spirit. God’s family, therefore, is composed of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Israel and the Church. Let us consider this typology in more detail:

Abraham is a type of the Father. He is not only the founding father of Israel but is also in a New Testament context described as the father of all believers. Paul says: “Therefore, know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7). Jesus was a descendant of Abraham, and through Him the blessing of salvation by faith has come to all nations. His first witnesses were believers in Israel – particularly the apostles.

We are only children of Abraham in the sense that God made a promise to him that he would be a blessing to all nations because the Saviour would emerge from among his descendants who would, at the same time, be called the Son of Abraham *and* the Son of God. In the very first verse of the New Testament we read: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” In view of this statement Paul says: “... that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus. ... For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:14, 26). Abraham is only a type of the heavenly Father, who sent the Word (Jesus) to be incarnated among the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, to be a son of Abraham effectively means to be a son of the heavenly Father through faith in Abraham’s physical descendant, Jesus Christ.

Sarah is a type of the people of Israel. Her marriage with Abraham typifies the spiritual marriage between the heavenly Father and the people of Israel, and from this union Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, would be born. However, Sarah was barren, thus reflecting Israel’s extended period of spiritual barrenness during Old Testament times. This was not a permanent state of affairs and the Lord promised better times to this barren woman:

“Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not laboured with child! ... For your Maker is your husband, The LORD of hosts is His name. ... For the LORD has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused, says your God. For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you” (Isa. 54:1, 5-7). Jeremiah further elaborates on God’s future mercies upon His wife, Israel:

“At the same time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people. ... Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! ... For thus says the LORD: Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!” (Jer. 31:1-7).

In Revelation 12 we also read about this woman, Israel, during the critical period just before the birth of her child who was destined to be Saviour and King of the world. She is depicted with a crown of 12 stars on her head, symbolising to the 12 tribes of Israel. Satan stood before her and wanted to destroy her child. In Herod he found a useful accomplice to execute his evil plan: “And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne” (Rev. 12:4-5). The catching up of the Child refers to the ascension of Christ. The descendants of the woman, Israel, will all be reconciled to the Messiah when He comes again (Rom. 11:26; Zech. 12:10; 13:8-9). That means that Israel’s severed relationship with the Father and the Son will be completely restored.

Isaac is the son of promise, who was born through divine intervention when Sarah was long past child-bearing age. Isaac was an early type of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus. The Lord tested Abraham’s faith and dedication when He asked him to sacrifice his only and beloved son on Mount Moriah: “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen. 22:2). Abraham was faithful to God and embarked on the journey to Moriah: “So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together” (Gen. 22:6).

Isaac later asked his father: “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering. So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham! So he said, Here I am. And He said, Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me. Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided” (Gen. 22:7-14).

The Lord will provide – *Yahweh Yireh*. On the mountain of the Lord He provided a ram to be sacrificed instead of Isaac. But the ram was also merely a type of His own Son who would be provided in the fullness of time as a sacrifice for the sins for the entire human race. He was also innocently sacrificed as He did nothing that deserved death. He carried His cross on His own shoulders, just as Isaac carried the wood for his sacrificial altar on his shoulders. Through God’s intervention, Abraham received his son back from the altar where he was virtually slayed: “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, In Isaac your seed shall be called, concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Heb. 11:17-19).

God gave His only begotten Son, whom He loves, as a ransom for our sins. He was the final fulfilment of all the typological sacrifices that were previously brought on Mount Moriah. That includes the sacrifice of Isaac, the ram which the Lord provided in his place, as well as the thousands of animal sacrifices which were brought during Old Testament times in the temple on the Lord’s Mountain in Jerusalem. However, according to Hebrews 10, the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins, and that is why the Father prepared a body for His Son to serve as a once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world. He was slain to redeem us for God by His blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). Jews who do not

accept the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, still keep on relying on the sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah, as well as all the typological sacrifices that were subsequently brought in the temple. However, these were only shadows of God's future mercies that were bestowed through His Son. On The Mountain of the Lord He provided a Sacrificial Lamb for the sins of the whole world.

As Abraham received his son back from the sacrificial altar, so God also received His Son back after laying down His life on a cross which he bore Himself. The Father raised Him from the dead, caught Him up to heaven and gave Him a Name which is above every name.

Eliezer. The servant of Abraham was regarded to be a member of the family as he was the oldest male member after Abraham and in control of all the servants and the property. In Genesis 15:2 we read: "But Abraham said, Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Subsequently, Isaac was born, and after Abraham received him back from the sacrificial altar he sent his servant Eliezer to go and find a wife for Isaac – not among the heathen nations of Canaan but in Abraham's country of origin in Mesopotamia.

When Eliezer proposed to a young woman to marry Isaac she was not to be coerced in any way but had to make a free choice: "And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath" (Gen. 24:8). Should she agree to the marriage, Eliezer had to lead her to Isaac. It was his task to accompany and protect her, and also to care for her on the long way through the wilderness to where Isaac was waiting on her.

That is exactly what the Holy Spirit does today. After the Lord Jesus made His atoning sacrifice and returned to the house of His Father, the Holy Spirit was commissioned to go into all the world and invite people everywhere to become members of Christ's bridal congregation. Should they agree, He stays with them and accompanies them on their earthly pilgrimage, teaching them more about the Father and His Son with whom they will conclude a spiritual marriage. He also endues them with the strength, boldness and spiritual gifts to participate in inviting other people to the marriage of the Lamb.

Rebekah. This girl received the invitation to become the wife of Isaac, and immediately accepted it. She fully introduced herself to the servant of Abraham, invited him to stay over in the house of her parents, and also accepted the betrothal gifts of a golden ring and golden bracelets. She gladly accepted Isaac as her future husband. After this important decision she immediately witnessed about this new relationship. Her testimony caused other members of her family to also open their house, hearts and lives to the welcome guest:

"So the young woman ran and told her mother's household these things. Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban, and Laban ran out to the man by the well. So it came to pass, when he saw the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, saying, Thus the man spoke to me, that he went to the man. And there he stood by the camels at the well. And he said, Come in, O blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels" (Gen. 24:28-31).

Rebekah's family did not oppose her in any way, and fully honoured her decision to become Isaac's wife. They said to Eliezer: "Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the LORD has spoken. And it came to pass, when Abraham's servant heard their words, that he worshiped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth. Then the servant brought out jewellery of silver, jewellery of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother" (Gen. 24:51-53). Abraham's blessing rests upon all who receive his servant and react positively to his invitation to the marriage of his son.

The next morning Rebekah's faith was tested when she had to decide whether she wanted to stay a few days longer in her parents' house (the old life) or whether she was prepared to immediately embark on the long journey to Isaac together with Eliezer. Her family members initially asked that she would be allowed to stay with them for another few days, but they were cautious not to stand in Eliezer's way and allowed Rebekah to decide for herself: "Then they arose in the morning, and he said, Send me away to my master. But her brother and her mother said, Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten; after that she may go. And he said to them, Do not hinder me, since the LORD has prospered my way; send me away so that I may go to my master. So they said, We will call the young woman and ask her personally. Then they called Rebekah and said to her, Will you go with this man? And she said, I will go. So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men" (Gen. 24:54-59).

Rebekah's decision at the well was the first and very important one to become the bride of Isaac. Her second decision was in connection with a complete surrender in which she had to demonstrate that she does not regard the interests of her family to be above those of Isaac, and that she was prepared to start right away with the new life to which she committed herself. Her decision was short and sound: "Yes, I will go!" Eliezer accompanied her all the way, guarded over her safety and told her everything about Abraham and his son.

Isaac awaited her outside in the field before she reached her final destination: "Now Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he dwelt in the South. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming. Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel. ... Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her" (Gen. 24:62-67).

In view of the fact that Isaac is such a clear type of the Lord Jesus, his bride Rebekah obviously typifies the bride of the Lamb. In the same way in which the servant of Abraham went out to look for her and invited her to become Isaac's bride, the Lord also seeks us through His Word and His Holy Spirit to enter into a much more exalted betrothal and marriage with the Son of our heavenly Father. As preparation for this union we should, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, put on Jesus Christ's robe of righteousness. Paul said to the church in Corinth: "I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). We should fully cooperate in the process by dedicating ourselves to work on this garment: "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8).

Isaac went out in the evening to meet his bride in the field. As the heavenly Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus will meet His bride in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17). That will be at the end of the church dispensation when the evening shadows are stretching. He will continue to love her, as always since their first meeting through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, and will then be united with her forever at the marriage of the Lamb.

Bound together by love

From the study of this typology it is evident that love was the most significant characteristic of Abraham's family – love for God and also love for one another. The love for God was preeminent, and that explains why Abraham did not withhold his son whom he dearly loved, when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham's faith in God was firm and irrevocable, and he believed that the Lord was able to raise him again from the dead. Isaac had the same faith and love in his heart, which explains why he did not complain or shy away when he was to be sacrificed. When Isaac afterwards got a wife he loved her with this same love which the Lord

had poured out in his heart. That is the secret why the blessing of the Lord so clearly rested upon their lives.

The question which we now have to answer is: How does divine love function as a basic principle of life in the New Testament family of God? As far as the Triune God is concerned, this principle has clearly not changed since God is love and will always remain unchanged. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the same, yesterday, today and forever. God loves lost humanity so much that He gave His only begotten Son as a sacrifice so that the penalty for our sins could be paid and our souls be saved. His saving grace still operates unchanged where His Word is proclaimed. As far as Israel is concerned, we have read in Jeremiah 31 that God loves them with an everlasting love, and still desires that they will return to Him as a people. He remains the same.

But how is the situation with the two other members of this family, i.e. Israel and the church? As a people, Israel is still alienated from God and His love, except for a small group of Messianic Jews who have accepted Jesus as Messiah. Paul confirms the fact that Israel's spiritual hardening is not permanent but only partial and temporary: "... hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:25-26).

Here on the Mountain of the Lord, where Abraham was called to sacrifice his son four thousand years ago, and where Jesus was sacrificed two thousand years ago, the Lord Jesus will appear at His second coming to save the entire remnant of Israel. On that day, Israel will look on Him whom they have pierced, and grieve for Him bitterly (Zech. 12:10).

As far as the church is concerned, the modern bride of Isaac, the situation is somewhat better but still not ideal. In Romans 5:5 Paul says that the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. If we can testify that we are reconciled to the Father by virtue of His Son's sacrifice, and that the Holy Spirit has poured out His agape love into our hearts, then it should be evident to all that love is the basic characteristic of our lives. Jesus said to His disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

If we testify about sanctification, divine love should be the basic feature of our lives since love is the first fruit of the Spirit. Paul says to the church in Corinth that he could not speak to them as to spiritual people who are filled with the Spirit of God, but as to carnal people who are still characterised by envy, strife and divisions (1 Cor. 3:1-3; cf. Gal. 5:25-26). Israel paid a high price for backsliding from the God of love. Unfortunately, many New Testament Christians also lapsed into lovelessness and fleshliness, thereby weakening and even nullifying their witness to the world. Many of them now revert to the Old Testament law in a vain effort to bring orderliness to their lives, because divine love is no longer the guiding principle in their personality expressions and behaviour.

We are living in a modern world which is moving away from God and His righteousness, and rapidly becomes spiritually apostatised and morally decadent. Lovelessness, unforgiveness, vindictiveness, double standards, corruption, deceitfulness and immorality are the order of the day. Only the family of God (the Triune God and His faithful children among Israel and the nations) can make a difference to be the light of a dark world and the salt of a corrupt earth. But then we should lead exemplary lives and be convincing witnesses of God's love and saving grace, and constantly walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). When Christ returns, we must give account before His judgement seat on how we executed the command to be His witnesses on earth, thereby demonstrating to the world that there is a more excellent way to follow.

8. Divine Agapé Love

Scripture reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

The apostle Paul defines the basic characteristics of a believer's spiritual life in 1 Corinthians 13:13, where he says: "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Why is love greater than faith and hope? Faith is an expression of the relationship between us and the Lord – the bond of faith between us – but love is the essential quality of that relationship. Faith transcends the boundaries of the seen world and connects us with Jesus Christ who is in the unseen, heavenly sphere. We believe in Him, we embrace Him by faith as our Saviour, and we also live by faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ... Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for He who comes to God must believe that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:1, 6). However, faith will cease when the Lord comes as we will see Him from face to face and the unseen world will then be fully revealed.

Likewise, hope is also part of the Christian's life. He puts his hope and trust in the Lord for temporary as well as eternal things. We have the hope on eternal life with the Lord "as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enter the inner part behind the veil" (Heb. 6:19). A person who does not have this hope is without God and without hope in the world (Eph. 2:12). But hope will also one day be finally fulfilled and therefore no longer be practised as a spiritual attribute.

However, love is everlasting and indestructible. There is an eternal bond of love between the heavenly Bridegroom and His bride. It will continue forever, and that is the major theme of the Bible – the agape love of God. Because God is love, and also loved us in our sinful state, He gave His Son to die for us so we can be saved: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Jesus Christ is the personification of God's love and mercy for sinful humanity. His love opens the way for a relationship of faith with God, and gives us hope for this life as well as our future life. Faith and hope can therefore only be practised because of love. Our lives should be a testimony of this fact. We should be rooted and grounded in the love of God (Eph. 3:17); we must grow up in love, it must be allowed to determine the basic principles our character as well as the nature of our entire life; yes, we must be perfected in God's love (1 John 2:5).

The five main characteristics of God's love are the following:

1. It is an eternal and unchangeable love

God's love exists from eternity to eternity. It is not a temporary and transient phenomenon. We are living in a depraved and fallen world in which everything is perishable. Nothing has value for eternity; consequently, this world cannot offer you lasting joy. Most people are changeable and untrustworthy because of their fleshliness and sinful nature. Kindness is often replaced by malevolence, acceptability by rejection, affection by aloofness, and love by uncharitableness, contempt and even hate.

However, God's love is everlasting and unchangeable. It offers you something to live for, on which you can always rely and which nobody can take away from you – not even death. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39). Agape love makes life extremely worthwhile because it is something which links you to the eternal God Himself across the boundaries of time and space. The most sublime and exalted thoughts which a believer can contemplate are on the love of God. A professor in literature was once asked by a reporter what the noblest and most meaningful words are that she has ever read. This woman is deeply religious, and apart from the Bible she has read

many books in three different languages. Without any hesitation she replied to the question by quoting only three words from 1 Corinthians 13:8 where Paul says: "Love never fails."

What an inspiring and blessed thought: "The love of God never fails!" It is a life-giving, unalienable and imperishable gift from God Himself. It offers you so much more than it asks from you. All that it asks from you is the willingness to be recreated by this love. You must arise from your life of sinfulness, short-sightedness and materialism, repent to the living God by believing in Him, then lead a life in which you will love Him through the Lord Jesus and put your trust in Him alone for time and eternity.

2. It is a love which gives

God's love is out-going in nature and reaches out to a needy world. That is why He could give the most precious gift of all to the world, i.e. His only-begotten Son who sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world. "Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

This characteristic of God's love is the direct opposite of the love of depraved man whose senses are blinded by Satan. Fallen man has a distorted, covetous and self-inclined love. He is puffed up, full of himself and like to boast about his own achievements. He loves himself at the cost of others. He desires whatever he sees and tries to get hold of it. He is not inclined to denying himself and helping others as he has no real compassion on those who suffer. He only loves those from whom he can gain something by using and even abusing them. He easily becomes embittered if things don't go his way, and is vindictive in nature.

How different is the pure, creative and selfless love of God! It is so big and genuine that it embraces all sinners. "God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). He loves all people, inclined Himself to them and brought them up out of a horrible pit and set their feet upon a rock. He took the eternal interests of all people to heart and is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

3. It is a love that can forgive and forget

God's love forgives completely and unqualified – so absolutely that He will not even once again refer to the sins that have been forgiven. He casts them into the depths of the sea and will remember them no more (Micah 7:19; Jer. 31:34). He keeps no record of wrongs and do not blame people for sins that were confessed and forsaken. Even if His children sin again He does not become embittered towards them but keeps on forgiving. Isaiah 55:7 says He will abundantly pardon.

People who have backslidden, for example the lost son in the parable, should only be prepared to return to their Father and settle their case with Him. They will find in Him a lovable and forgiving Father who will again prepare a feast to welcome them back in His kingdom. He will not be angry with them if they truly repent: "Return, backsliding Israel, says the LORD; I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful, says the LORD; I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God" (Jer. 3:12-13).

How different is the reaction of fallen man, how insincere his love, and how slow to fully forgive and get the matter out of his mind. Solomon says: "He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates the best of friends" (Prov. 17:9). Not only friends, but also married couples, part ways because of accusations based upon past sins. People who are not filled with God's love and forgiveness can easily become embittered, rake up old conflicts and again accuse one another for what had happened in the distant past. We should demonstrate the nature of Christ by never again referring to past iniquities that are forgiven. They are cast into the depth of the sea with a "no fishing" sign on the shore.

We have the following clear command on forgiveness: “Put on tender mercies, ... bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful” (Col. 3:12-15). God’s love helps us to reach out to others, to forgive, yes, even up to 70 times 7, to heal wounds and restore broken relationships.

4. It is the law of the New Testament

To be rooted and grounded in the love of God is the secret of a life of complete spiritual fulfilment. That is why we only have one comprehensive law, or principle of life, in the New Testament, and that is the law of love. If you love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, with all your mind and all your strength, you will remain faithful to Him and never bow the knee before idols. If you love your neighbour as yourself, you will have fulfilled all the laws that regulate your relationships with fellow-men: “Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law” (Rom. 13:10).

Love should be the major characteristic of a Christian’s life. In His High priestly prayer Jesus said to the Father: “I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26). To the disciples He said: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Your life, attitudes and works should be characterised by divine love, and not by subservience to the letter of the Old Testament law. Divine love is dynamic, it actively promotes Christlikeness, and is expressed in moral and spiritual virtues which far supersede the dictates of the Old Testament law (cf. Tit. 2:11-14).

5. It is boundless

We cannot impose any boundaries or restrictions on the love of Jesus. We must be conscious of the fact that it encompasses every aspect of our existence. Paul says in his prayer for the Ephesians: “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:14-19).

Although we may be able to comprehend the riches of God’s love, it still does not mean that we can fully fathom it. God’s love in Christ Jesus is immeasurable and boundless in its full extent. It is wider than the world, deeper than the deepest sea, and higher than the highest heaven. We are full of wonder for the unsearchable nature of the love and saving grace of the Lord Jesus. He is full of grace and truth (John 1:14), and in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col. 2:3). His omnipotence and love are without limits. He can supply in every need of us through the riches of His grace.

This loving Saviour also draws you and me to Him with cords of love. He does not only wish to save us and give us eternal life, but to establish us perfectly and completely in His love. Through the Holy Spirit He pours out His love into our hearts. He renders us shining lights in a dark and unloving world, and we should ever ensure that we are not excluded from God’s boundless love and grace by the self-imposed restriction of selfishness and lovelessness. Is your life fully under the control of God’s recreative, unchangeable and everlasting love? If that is the case, you will have a strong sense of urgency to share this message with other people. But your strongest desire will be the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom who will soon take His bride away to heaven where she will always be with Him.

A Heart filled with divine love

The new life which the Lord Jesus gives us will only fully manifest when we have a heart filled with agape love. All true believers who have trusted the Lord for this blessing can join Paul in testifying: "... the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5). This love completely changes our lives – spiritually, intellectually and emotionally – since agape love shapes our worldview, defines our spiritual life, and serves as a motivating force to all our actions. On a spiritual level we experience a deep love for God, for our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, for everybody close to us, and also for all people in the lost world around us. We contemplate only the best for everybody and would dearly like to see the lost being saved.

On the intellectual level the Holy Spirit gives us enlightened eyes of our mind, which is divine wisdom to understand everything in the world from a biblical perspective (Eph. 1:17-18). In the emotional sphere we receive the precious gifts of compassion for the lost, empathy for those who suffer, and tolerance towards our critics and all who are deceived. God's love also gives us self-control under provocation and the ability to overcome evil with good.

Characteristics of this nature are instilled in us by the Holy Spirit, and if we allow Him to do it freely without the opposition of an uncrucified flesh, the fruit of the Spirit will be evident in our lives. Paul says: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). These are the nine features of a heart and life in which divine love has been instilled by the Holy Spirit.

The first three fruits describe our relationship with God; the second three our relationship with other people; while the last three fruits describe the nature of our personal life:

Our relationship with God

Love. God is love. God's love was the motivation for saving your soul. To make that possible He sent His Son to the world to pay a ransom for the salvation of sinners. When you received this agape love He called you out of darkness into the marvellous light of Christ. In this way, an eternal bond of love was established between you and the Lord – you serve Him because you love Him. You are eager to enjoy His company, you sing His praises, honour Him and call upon His Name.

Joy. There is a divine joy in your heart for the great salvation which you have received as a gift, and you rejoice in the Lord every day. Together with King David you can sing: "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. ... He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:1-5, 10-13). The joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10).

Peace. In your heart there is a peace which surpasses all understanding because the Lord Jesus is your peace. He said: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). The peace of the world is false, but the Lord's peace is a deep, inner consciousness that your sins are forgiven and you are reconciled to God through the cross. You don't have to fear anything as you will not come into the judgement of the sinners. You also know that no hostile powers, distress, persecution or any other problems or attacks will ever be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:34-39).

Our relationship with other people

When divine love is put into action towards your neighbours, it manifests through the following three attributes:

Long-suffering. You are no longer hateful and judgemental towards people, but long-suffering. You pity them and pray for them, even for many years, without becoming despondent and abandoning them. The Lord has possibly waited a long time for you to draw near to Him, and has given you many chances to repent. Because of His long-suffering you keep on trusting Him to also save other people who might as yet appear to be disinterested.

Kindness. You are also a friendly and hospitable person who do not only live for yourself, but have time for others and also reach out to them. Selfishness, jealousy and the heartless seeking of your own interests are not characteristics of divine love.

Goodness. You do good to other people and give what you can to alleviate their sorry plight and supply in their needs. Paul says: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Our personal characteristics

The third group of fruits are personal characteristics which you develop with self-discipline under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When you do that, you will be recognised as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, demonstrate His image in your life and truly follow in His footsteps.

Faithfulness. You are faithful in all your commitments, above all your quiet times, and not a careless and disorganised person who neglects his duties.

Gentleness. You have a gentle spirit, which suggests that you are not merciless, ruthless and unapproachable, but a gracious person who is full of compassion for those who suffer. Gentleness also means that you don't have a hardened heart which resists the Word of God. You have a teachable spirit and are open to admonition and instruction from God's Word.

Self-control. This personality trait means that that you refrain from impulsive actions and utterances for which you later have to apologise. You do not, in a moment of anger, make derogatory remarks which arise from an uncrucified flesh, as that is definitely not the fruit of the Spirit. How do people experience you in everyday life? Solomon says: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. ... He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit" (Prov. 16:32; 17:27). In the New Testament, this precious characteristic, together with the other that were mentioned, is described as the fruit of the Spirit. You need the grace of the Lord to conform to this standard, as these fruits are expressions of the divine nature.

Are these nine fruits of the Spirit also a description of your life as a Christian? If not, confess the fact that you haven't often grieved the Holy Spirit through your thoughts, desires, attitudes, words and actions. Settle your case with the Lord and completely subject yourself to the authority of the indwelling Spirit of God. He will lead you in the ways of righteousness so agape love can also become the main characteristic of your life. This love is the basis of the divine nature, and every Christian should strive to fully walk in its light.

Are you aware of the imperishable and unchangeable nature of God's love? It never fails and will carry you through every crisis. Do you realise that it is boundless and unfathomable? There is no sin which cannot be forgiven, and never too little grace to supply in your needs. God inclined Himself from heaven to save you, and that obliges you to also share His love with others. God completely forgave your iniquities and no longer remember your sins – you should do the same to others. Agape love will guide your footsteps as it has its own inherent dynamics and principles – you don't need any other rules and laws to live by. There is no better life to have than a heart filled with divine love by the Holy Spirit.

9. Peter's Life Before and After Pentecost

Scripture reading: Matthew 16:13-23

Holy men of the Bible should not be elevated to the level of role models as the circumstances and calling of each one are unique. Jesus Christ is our only role model and we are called to a life of conformity to Him. Peter says that Jesus has set an example to us that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). The secret of a life of victory is to abide in Christ (John 15:4-5) and not to be a follower of men. We can nevertheless learn much from the life and experiences of Peter and other holy men – not only from what they have achieved but also from their failures. We should not make the same mistakes as they have made. If we do fail like they have done, we should take note of the way in which they have overcome their problems and again restored their relationship with the Lord. But pay special attention to what they have achieved positively and derive inspiration from it to become better followers of the Lord Jesus.

There were various outstanding highs and regrettable lows in the life of Peter, and his spiritual victories are a lasting legacy to Christians of all times. It is evident that there were two distinct phases in his life as disciple. First, there was the precarious part of his life between his conversion and filling with the Holy Spirit, but after the day of Pentecost we see Peter as the Spirit-filled disciple who achieved big things in the expansion of the Lord's kingdom. In spite of the most severe pressure on him he never again succumbed to temptations and onslaughts against him, and persevered on the narrow way until the end. The following were the most important phases in Peter's spiritual development:

His calling and training

Peter was a fisherman at the Sea of Galilee when he was called to become a disciple of the Lord Jesus: "And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men'. They immediately left their nets and followed Him" (Matt. 4:18-20).

Jesus called a small group of disciples to be intensively trained for their future role to serve Him full-time as evangelists. That does not mean that all the witnesses of Christ should resign their work to serve Him full-time – everyone must clearly understand his own calling. Even a dedicated apostle such as Paul made tents for his own financial support, but that was never a very important focus of his life. Peter left everything to follow Jesus – his work *and* his family – and he subsequently only returned to his former occupation as a fisherman for one night when he thought it was too difficult and also too dangerous to serve the Lord Jesus. However, he was soon delivered from his doubts, fears and lack of motivation.

His knowledge, impetuosity and denial of the Messiah

Peter was the first disciple who openly declared that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. He said without any hesitation: "You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus answered and said to him, "You are Peter [derived from *petros*, a small rock] and on this *petra* [a large rock] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). On the rock of Peter's testimony of Jesus as the Son of God the church of Christ would be built.

During the time when Peter received the important revelation on Jesus as the promised Messiah and Son of God, he was not yet a Spirit-filled believer and did not understand the whole counsel of God. He did not understand that Jesus would come twice, and that at His first coming He was destined to be the suffering Messiah who would lay down His life for sinners. Because of his fleshliness and ignorance Peter could not understand why Christ had to suffer and die. The devil exploited his ignorance and made him say things that were

contrary to the gospel of salvation: “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You! But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:21-23).

Within a few moments Peter proclaimed a great truth as well as an extreme form of deception. He could not understand the necessity of Jesus’ suffering and death, and expressed himself against this idea. He did this in spite of the many Old Testament prophecies on the suffering Messiah who had to pay the ransom for our sins. Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 clearly reflect this message, but Peter did not yet understand that Jesus had to follow the way of shedding His blood for the salvation of sinners.

The lack of spiritual discernment on the gospel is characteristic of carnal Christians who do not speak and act under the anointing and guidance of the Holy Spirit. They may correctly understand certain things, but in other respects they reveal great ignorance – to such an extent that they render themselves of no use in the service of God. The Lord Jesus knows the origin of spiritual deception, and rebukes Satan who spoke through Peter. It is ironical that Peter was sometimes a mouthpiece for the Lord but at other times a mouthpiece for the devil.

Even after Peter was corrected about his erroneous views, it was not the end of his fleshly arrogance. Shortly before the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter and his fellow disciples again demonstrated their poor judgement: “Then Jesus said to them, All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night. ... Peter answered and said to Him, Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble. Jesus said to him, Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times. Peter said to Him, Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You! And so said all the disciples” (Matt. 26:31-35). Peter also influenced the other disciples to merely rely on themselves.

One can have the best and most noble intentions to only follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus without deviating from them, but without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit they will come to nought. The evening before the crucifixion, Peter strongly denied three times that he was a disciple of Jesus. Shortly before the death sentence by crucifixion was imposed upon Jesus, and His disciples were under severe pressure of persecution, Peter was not even able to confess before a lowly servant girl that he was a follower of Jesus. He went as far as denying with an oath that he knew Him at all (Matt. 26:69-74).

Peter soon realised his mistake: “And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times. So he went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75). When your best intentions end in failure, you feel very disappointed, ashamed and sorry about your cowardly action. Your self-image is shattered and your testimony as a Christian has been nullified. You wonder how it was possible to be such a weakling. However, Peter did not abandon the struggle, he had bitter remorse because of his failures and resolved to try again.

His temporary and partial restoration

During this time, Peter was still not filled with the Holy Spirit; consequently, not much would come from his efforts to restore his position as a faithful disciple. Shortly after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ he again joined the other disciples in an effort to mend his broken spiritual life. However, the disciples were all extremely fearful after the execution of Jesus and took refuge behind a locked door. The Sunday when Jesus rose from the grave they were still in hiding: “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst,

and said to them, Peace be with you” (John 20:19).

During this meeting the disciples received the Great Commission for the first time (John 20:21). Although they already had the peace of the forgiveness of sins through the Holy Spirit, they were not yet endued with the power of the Holy Spirit and could therefore not yet start evangelising the world. They first had to be properly prepared for this assignment. Jesus said: “... but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:46-49).

Before the filling of the Holy Spirit, Peter and the other disciples realised that they did not have the spiritual power and motivation to confront an apostate, hostile world with the gospel of Christ. They were aware of their inability, they shied away from the immense challenge and decided to maintain a low profile by returning to their previous occupation. Peter said to them: “I am going fishing. They said to him, We are going with you also. They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing” (John 21:3).

The Lord Jesus knew the reason for their lack of knowledge and spiritual understanding, but clearly showed them that they would not be lucky when returning to the world. He met with them at the Sea of Galilee, through a miracle ensured that they catch a lot of fish, and in this way demonstrated to them that only He could make a big difference in their lives. He was definitely also able to make them fishers of men. Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to confirm three times that he loves Him. By doing so he made up for the three times when he denied Jesus, and he then received the command to shepherd the flock of the Lord Jesus by caring for them and giving them spiritual food on time (John 21:15-17).

Among the fleshly Christians there are also various persons who, after a time, decide to no longer follow and serve the Lord, but to rather return to secular occupations and to fully enjoy themselves in the world. They no longer seek the Lord and only serve Him in a very uncommitted way. Such people will never find true joy, because they have exchanged a spiritual calling for something which is temporary, inferior and unfulfilling. To them, there is only one corrective action out of their impasse and that is back to the Lord Jesus, to renewed cleansing by His blood and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Backsliders must read Psalm 51 and make a new surrender to the Lord.

The filling of the Holy Spirit

Peter was among the group of 120 disciples and other believers who waited in Jerusalem on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the promised enduing with power from on high. In Acts 1:8 the Lord Jesus said: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The commission was great but so also the enabling power of the Spirit which was promised to them.

Peter, who was at an earlier stage not even able to admit to a lowly servant that he was a follower of Jesus, humbled himself with the other disciples for ten days to confess his sinfulness and fleshliness, to put his trust completely in Jesus Christ and to wait on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and Peter proclaimed the gospel with great boldness to an agnostic Jewish nation. He delivered a powerful message and in one day moved 3 000 people to accept Christ as their Saviour. That was the early beginnings of the Christian church on earth.

Subsequently, the early church often suffered from fleshliness and a lack of knowledge, which underscores the fact that all of us need the filling of the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace. Without this experience we will not achieve anything in the service of the Lord. Israel not only had to go through the Red Sea of rebirth but also through the Jordan of a complete surrender and mortification of the old life of falling and rising again. The same principle applies to all

believers, as all of us are faced with the challenge of overcoming our human weaknesses by being endowed with divine power from heaven.

In the phase of Peter's life after Pentecost he experienced what it was to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and to reach out past earthly goals and sufferings to our eternal home in heaven. From his own experience he knew what it was to be a fleshly Christian who often disappointed and even denied Christ, but after these setbacks he fully accepted the challenge to wait on the Lord until he was endowed with power from high. After that experience he was unwavering in his commitment, even right down to the end when he was confronted by a martyr's death. The Holy Spirit strengthened his faith and helped him to fearlessly contend for the great truths of the gospel, without which no sinner can obtain everlasting life.

Do you also walk in fullness of the Holy Spirit? You will then have received the power to be a witness for Christ and to remain standing in the midst of the most testing circumstances without becoming despondent and turning back to the world. You will also become strong in the Lord to successfully resist the attacks of the devil. Furthermore, your knowledge of the Lord and His Word will increase until you will be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth of the love of Christ, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17-19).

His letters to the believers

Peter was so completely filled with the Holy Spirit and divine wisdom that the Spirit led him to write two epistles which later became part of the Bible. He exhorted Messianic congregations to set their hope fully upon the grace that will be bestowed on them when Jesus Christ returns, since they were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:13-19). The cross did for them what the law could not do.

He insisted that they should proclaim the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9), and alerted them to the fact that there is solid historical proof for the message which he and the other apostles proclaim: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16).

The young congregations were also reminded that they are sojourners and pilgrims in an evil and perishing world in which they would encounter much tribulation (1 Pet. 2:11; 4:1-19). He devoted an entire chapter to the tragic phenomenon of backsliders who deviated from the way of the Lord and returned to a sinful life in the world (2 Pet. 2:1-22). But he encouraged Christians to remain spiritually standing in this godless and transient world: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

Sanctification was a very important theme in his preaching and epistles. He repeated the command to Israel in Leviticus 11:44, thereby confirming that it applies to all believers of all time: "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Man was created according to God's image of holiness, but this image in humans was shattered by the Fall. However, we are called upon to again put on God's image of complete holiness as that is the only way in which we can please Him. If we become conformable to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, we put on the Lord Jesus and walk by His Spirit.

Peter's death as a martyr for Christ

We should be committed to heed the Lord's commands towards us, and to leave the future in His hands. We do not even know what will happen tomorrow; therefore, we should every day do what our hand finds to do while always endeavouring to be found busy with the things of the Lord when He comes to take us to our eternal home.

According to *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Peter was sentenced to death and executed in Rome. Nero was looking for reasons to execute Peter, but local Christians learnt about these plans and strongly urged Peter to flee from the city and escape his ordeal. Peter was initially unwilling to leave the city but was eventually persuaded by fellow-believers to avoid the planned execution. However, when he reached the city gates the Lord Jesus appeared to him, and Peter asked Him: "Lord, whither do Thou go?" Jesus replied: "I have come again to be crucified." Peter clearly understood the message, and realised that he should not try to avoid his own crucifixion. He was to suffer for the sake of Christ and immediately turned back into the city. Soon afterwards he was executed, but at his own request he was crucified upside down as he regarded himself unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as Christ.

It is only when your eyes are fixed on your final destination in heaven that you will follow and serve the Lord Jesus unconditionally – regardless of the cost. The filling with the Holy Spirit is an absolute necessity for a life of unwavering service to the Lord, as well as fearlessness for its possible consequences – even if it means a martyr's death. After his repentance, Peter had a very definite experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Can you testify about the filling of the Holy Spirit and do you still walk in the Spirit? Without that experience you will not have strong convictions, you will be carried about by every wind of doctrine, you will easily succumb to the smallest opposition, and, above all, you will not be fit to serve as a witness for Christ while He tarries to come. We must also, like the 120 faithful followers of Jesus in the upper room, wait on the Lord until we are endued with power from on high. Then alone will we be able to confidently fulfil the task which He has assigned to us.

10. The Christian as a Temple of the Holy Spirit

Scripture reading: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple are you” (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

After the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the prophetic purpose of the temple service in Jerusalem was fulfilled and its shadowy rituals became obsolete. The altar of burnt offering, on which repetitive sacrifices were made for the sins of the people, was no longer needed because of the once for all sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross for the remission of the whole world’s sin. The incense altar was also redundant because the prayers of Christians worldwide are a sweet-smelling aroma before the Lord. Neither is the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy place needed any longer, because Christ is now on the throne of His Father in heaven where He intercedes for us.

We have free access to the throne of grace as often as we wish because the veil was torn in two when Christ atoned for the sins of the world. We no longer need priests to bring sacrifices on our behalf. Furthermore, the lampstand in the temple is no longer needed as the Christians are now the light of the world. The table with the showbread has likewise become obsolete as Christians now have the duty of serving the water and bread of life to a perishing humanity. A complete shift in emphasis has therefore occurred from the ritualistic temple service in Jerusalem to Christians who have each in their own right been called to be a temple of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells. It is imperative that we determine exactly what the Lord expects of us in order to, spiritually speaking, function properly as temples through which He can achieve His purpose on earth.

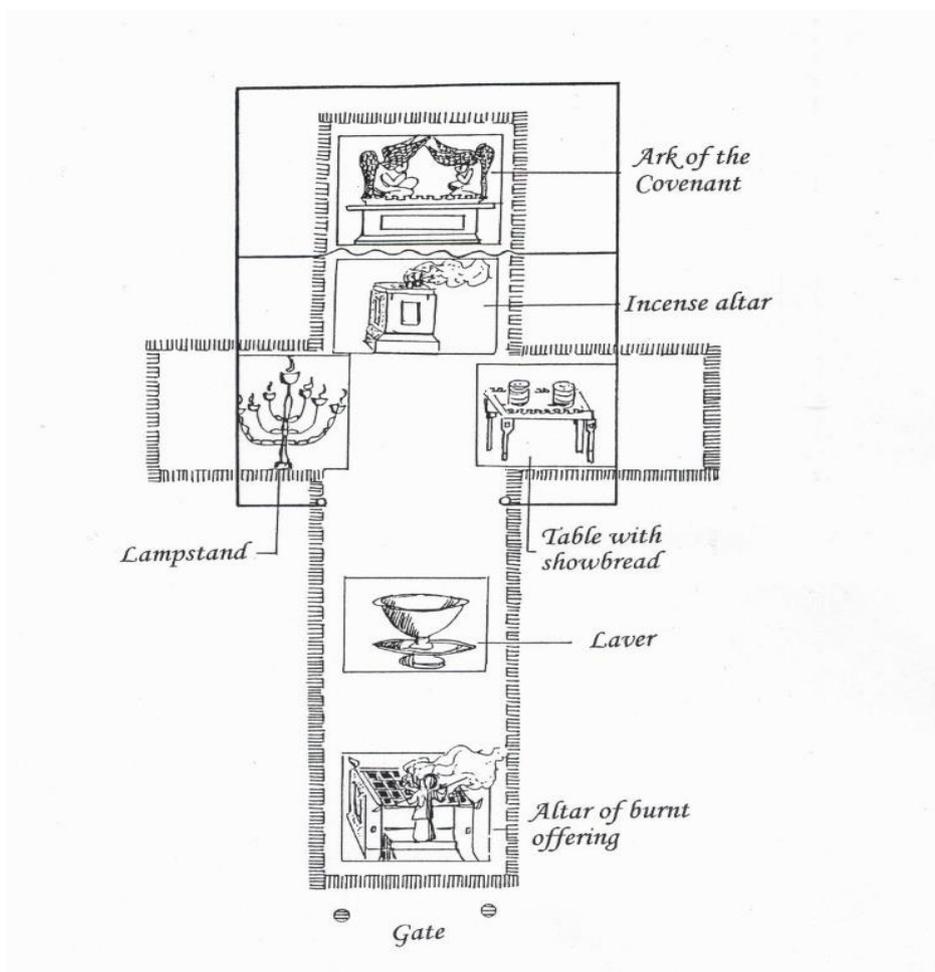
When we consider the temple service, as well as other revelations of God to humanity, it is conspicuous that there are always two perspectives which are emphasised, i.e. firstly the man-God-relationship and secondly our relationship towards fellow-human beings. The laws that were given to Israel at Sinai, were written on two stone tablets – on the one our relationship with God is described and on the other one the relationship with our neighbours. The same two perspectives are evident from Jesus’ summary of the law into two basic laws: love towards God and love towards your neighbour. The cross on which Jesus was crucified also reflects these two perspectives. The one beam points up towards heaven and our relationship with God, while the horizontal beam symbolises a reaching out towards the spiritual needs of the world.

These two aspects of our life of faith are interdependent as the one cannot exist without the other. It is imperative that we all have a relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ, as that defines our basic position as believers. This relationship should be daily renewed and strengthened through the filling of the Holy Spirit. When my soul is satisfied with good things, I am obliged to also share the gospel message with other people. The love of Christ constrains me to do that, as that is the outward proof that I have a living faith in my heart. Faith without works is dead, and if I fail to reach out to others with the gospel, there is a serious question about the nature of my own life of faith. The Lord expects it from all His children to be the light of a dark world and the salt of a corrupt earth.

Our Christian service in the world is equally dependent upon strong convictions of faith and an intimate relationship with the Lord. When that is lacking our works are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, and are mere human efforts which are carried out in the power of the flesh. Such works are not driven by the Spirit and are of no value from God’s point of view. It is important that we have a sound relationship with the Lord if we wish so have success in our public ministry: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your

Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matt. 6:6). If you maintain a right relationship with the Lord, you will have a secret source of power in your life which will be very obvious in your testimony and labour among people. They will clearly see that the blessing of the Lord rests upon your life.

To be able to function successfully as a temple of God, both these perspectives should be fully observed. It is conspicuous that the furniture and equipment in the Old Testament temple were arranged in the shape of a cross, with the vertical and horizontal lines cutting across each other in the Holy Place. The temple thus foreshadowed future things because its symbolism pointed ahead to the future redemptive work of the Messiah. In the light of this symbolism we can determine how we should function as temples of God.



The man-God-perspective

The first line in this cross represents the man-God-relationship. It starts at the gate, proceeds through the outer court, and then into the temple right up to the ark of the covenant. The gate leading to the court provides an entrance to the Lord’s sanctuaries, and was fulfilled at the coming of the Messiah. He said: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (John 10:9). On entering the court, we first encounter the altar for burnt offering where sacrifices were made for the atoning of people’s sins. All these repetitive sacrifices pointed to Jesus’ once for all sacrifice (John 1:29). “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7). Further on, we come to the laver where the priests washed their hands after offering the sacrifices, resulting in the water being mixed with blood. That was the proof of a completed sacrifice. After Jesus had died on the cross, water and blood flowed from His side as a sign that He had died and laid down His life for us (John 19:33-34).

As one enters into the Holy place and walks straight forward one reaches the incense altar. It had an overlay of gold and was used for the burning of incense as a continuous sweet aroma to the Lord. This sweet-smelling aroma symbolised continuous prayer, through which we gain access to the presence of God.

Right at the back of the incense altar was the veil which divided the Holy from the Most Holy place. The Ark of the Testimony (or Ark of the Covenant) was there, which represents God's throne of grace. Only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement, to atone for the nation's sins. The true presence of the Lord was therefore not accessible to the ordinary people and other priests, as they were prohibited from entering the area behind the veil. However, the divide between the Holy and Most Holy was removed by the personal sacrifice of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. We read in Luke 23:45 about the moment when Jesus died on the cross: "Then ... the veil of the temple was torn in two".

That means that the Old Testament's sacrificial system and prayers by High Priests were abolished and that every believer is now permitted to enter in before the Lord's throne of grace through prayer. Paul says: "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:19-22). Since that moment the need for the temple service has become redundant as the Lord no longer reveals Himself to believers through human mediators – Jesus Christ is our Mediator and High Priest.

All the focal points mentioned above follow a straight line which runs from the gate through the altar for burnt offerings, the laver and the incense altar, to the Ark of the Covenant behind the veil. This line represents the man-God-relationship, and is an illustration of how a person may enter in from the sinful world on the path of salvation which leads to reconciliation to God through the only Saviour of lost humanity. That is the vertical perspective which reaches upwards to the Lord's throne of grace.

Relations towards fellow-humans

There is another line which cuts across this one to form a cross – that is the horizontal perspective. At the two sides of the Holy place there are, respectively, the golden lampstand and the tables with the showbread. The lampstand refers to the Messiah as the light of the world, and the showbread to Christ as the bread (or sustainer) of life.

Through His crucifixion the Lord has, on the vertical level, opened the way to His throne of grace in heaven in order that sinners from everywhere may be forgiven and spiritually regenerated. For that reason, He could stretch out His arms horizontally on the cross to be the light to a dark world and the bread of life to perishing humanity. It is His express will that both of these perspectives be observed in the lives of His disciples. We should walk according to His ways, experience the continued cleansing by His blood (1 John 1:7), and pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17); but we must also move out to proclaim Christ to a lost world.

The temple of God is a place where the Lord reveals Himself in His holiness and love, and from where the message must go out that the Saviour has come to seek and to save those who are lost. In the New Testament, the temple of the Lord is in the hearts and lives of people who were regenerated by Him, and through whom He reveals Himself to the world. He only lives in a holy temple, and that is the reason why He expects us to be blameless in holiness.

However, many Christians do not realise that they were called upon to be temples of the Lord and to live holy lives. To such believers Paul asks: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). How does the temple service function in your life?

Consider the great dilemma in which the orthodox Jews are who still adhere to the Old Testament shadows of the temple service, simply because they refuse to accept that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who sacrificed His life for our sins and opened the way to God's throne of grace through the torn veil. Their situation is indeed lamentable, and it amounts to a form of self-imposed spiritual exile. According to their own perceptions, the absence of a physical temple prohibits these people from being reconciled to God. Even if they do build a temple, they will be barred from God's presence by a veil, except for one day a year, when they will seek God's presence in vain through obsolete animal sacrifices.

The discovery must first be made that the sign of the cross in the plan of the temple prophetically points to the Messiah who came in the fullness of time to fulfil the law and the prophets. How wonderful is it that the day will indeed come when the remnant in Israel will look on Him whom they have pierced, and grieve for Him bitterly (Zech. 12:10). Only then will the whole nation who survived the time of Jacob's trouble, conclude a new covenant with the Lord and no longer serve Him through the mediation of priests and animal sacrifices.

11. The Spirit of Prophecy

Scripture reading: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; ... and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13-14). “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

All Biblical prophecies were written under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and only He can give us enlightened eyes of the mind to understand them. Biblical prophecies are inherently part of God’s absolute truth, and for that reason every word is sure and trustworthy. Peter says: “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place ... knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:19-21). The prophetic word does not only help us to embrace the blessed hope that the heavenly Bridegroom will come to take us away to our heavenly destination, but also to better understand dark periods of judgement, and to warn people against them.

The judgements of God are meant for those people who declined the offer of His grace made through Jesus Christ – that is the reason why the Holy Spirit also announces judgements (cf. Isa. 4:4). A world which despises and rejects the saving grace of God must inevitably hear the message of God’s wrath upon the wicked. Sin will not go unpunished. If people refuse to confess and forsake their sins before God’s throne of grace they will, themselves, be responsible to serve the punishment for their sins. They will then discover that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). Unthinkable judgements are awaiting the lost. Jesus Christ is not only the Saviour but also the Judge of the world.

Every person who is committed to lead a Spirit-filled life will experience that the Holy Spirit will instil a love for biblical prophecies in his heart, and also the wisdom to understand them.

Prophecies on Israel

A large body of biblical prophecies relate to the nation of Israel and refers to their calling as a people of God, their establishment in the Promised Land, the birth of the Messiah in the house of David, Israel’s international dispersion due to unbelief, their end-time return to the land and their spiritual purging during the tribulation period, the second coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the entire remnant of Israel, the restoration of the throne of David in Jerusalem, followed by the Messiah’s millennial reign of peace when the fully restored Israel will have the opportunity to fulfil their calling to evangelise the whole world. This nation plays such a pivotal role in the Bible’s prophetic programme that they are aptly described as “the watch of God.”

When Old Testament prophecies on Israel’s future are read, it should always be kept in mind that the church dispensation was a mystery which was not revealed to the prophets; consequently, they did not prophesy on the church among all nations (cf. Rom. 16:25-26). That is the reason why prophecies on the first and second coming of the Messiah are often mentioned together, as if the two events occur in short succession, without any mention of the long church dispensation which elapses between them.

Zechariah 9:9-10 says: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. ... He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” A long period has indeed elapsed since the time when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and the (much later) establishment of His world-wide reign of peace at His second coming.

The description of the 70 year-weeks of Israel’s history of salvation after their Babylonian exile

is also presented in Daniel 9:24-27 in such a way that it appears to be a continuous period without interruption. The reign of the Antichrist during the 70th week therefore seems to follow directly upon the crucifixion of the Messiah at the end of 69 year-weeks. However, it was not revealed to Daniel that the church dispensation would follow upon Israel's rejection of their Messiah. Jesus said to His disciples that Israel would be scattered from their land to all nations, and that Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24). This long interruption in Israel's history of salvation continued for almost two millennia, and they are only now back in their land. The 70th year-week can begin any time after the appearance of the false messiah and his conclusion of a seven-year covenant with Israel and the nations (Dan. 9:27).

Let us review a number of prophecies on Israel's spiritual awakening in the end-time, and what their consequences will be. On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out, Israel had another opportunity to repent as a nation and accept the Messiah. However, they did not do it, and only a small minority of them reacted positively to the gospel. Peter boldly and earnestly called the nation to repentance. With reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and all the signs accompanying this event, he said:

"But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those day; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:16-21; cf. Joel 2:28-32).

Although Peter said that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit almost 2 000 years ago was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecies, it was only a partial fulfilment of the promise. The final fulfilment of these prophecies will only occur in the day of the Lord, which will be the time of judgements during the coming tribulation period of seven years. Then, there will be dramatic signs on earth and in the heavens, the sun will be darkened and the moon turn into blood before the awesome day of the Messiah's second coming at the end of the great tribulation. In that time, after the true church as a temple of Holy Spirit has been taken away, there will be a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Israel, and that will coincide with supernatural signs and special revelations.

It is important to understand that at the rapture a distinct dispensational change will occur as the church dispensation will then come to an end. During the church age we had the full revelation of God's Word, the Holy Spirit guided us into all truth, and every Christian individually as well as congregations corporately functioned as temples of the Holy Spirit to be witnesses for Christ. There was no need for extra-biblical revelations; therefore, such phenomena should not be pursued (Rev. 22:18-19). Supernatural signs which relate to judgement, also did not occur during the church age as this is the age of grace – not of judgement. The judgements of God on the unbelieving world will only be poured out during the coming tribulation period.

However, after the church age has elapsed, the temple of the Holy Spirit and the witnesses of Christ will no longer be here. All those who remain behind, including the largest part of the people of Israel, will be alienated from God and His Word, and be exposed to the Antichrist's strong power of delusion. During that time, God will again make use of prophets. At the end of the Old Testament He said to unbelieving Israel: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Mal. 4:5). The Lord says that Elijah will have an important ministry in Israel, lest He strikes the land with a curse because of

their unbelief (Mal. 4:6). It is possible that the end-time Elijah will be one of the two special witnesses of Revelation 11, who will strongly oppose the false messiah and persuade people to believe in the true Messiah.

The result of the new outpouring of God's Spirit, when the prophecies in Joel 2 will be finally fulfilled, will be that a remnant in Israel will be prepared to be reconciled to the Messiah when He comes again. The Lord says: "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself" (Zech. 12:10-12).

The Lord adds to this: "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. It shall be in that day, says the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered" (Zech. 13:1-2). The Lord will therefore, in the near future, achieve a great and wonderful purpose with Israel by also restoring them spiritually as His people. Their physical and political restoration were only preliminary phases, pending their spiritual awakening and quickening. The Lord made the following promise through the prophet Ezekiel:

"Therefore say to the house of Israel ... I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; ... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God" (Ezek. 36: 22, 24-28).

God's purpose with the spiritual restoration of Israel is that they will serve Him with all their heart. Their spiritual awakening as a people will occur progressively through the seven years of tribulation. Shortly after the rapture and the revelation of the Antichrist the Spirit of God will start working mightily among them. From that moment onwards, Jews will specifically be saved as Jews – no longer as in the church dispensation when national identity did not matter. Shortly after the end of the church dispensation, the Lord will save 144 000 Jews – 12 000 from each of the 12 tribes of the children of Israel (Rev. 7:2-8). This core group will be representative of the entire nation, and they will specially be set apart to serve the Lord during the first half of the tribulation period. They will openly take a stand against the false messiah, and lead many Jews as well as Gentiles to Christ.

The largest group of Jews will, in spite of the testimony of the Messianic Jews in their midst (the 144 000 and the two witnesses), continue to recognise the false messiah under the impression that he is the true messiah (cf. John 5:43). During that stage they will still not have received the number of the Antichrist as that will only be compulsory in the second half of the tribulation period. It will therefore still be possible to abrogate their covenant with him.

That is exactly what will happen when the Antichrist enters the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem during the middle of the tribulation, set up an image of himself in the Most Holy and declare himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:15). In reaction to that, most Jews will break their covenant with him and will then have to flee to the mountains in great haste (Matt. 24:15-22). It is expected that they will flee in a south-easterly direction to the mountains next to the Dead Sea, and then probably further south along the sea until they reach Petra, south of the Dead Sea in Jordan. Conditions will be critical for survival, as the Antichrist will order genocide of the Jews and command his military forces to pursue the fugitive Jews and kill them.

This situation will be reminiscent to Israel's exodus from Egypt when Pharaoh's armies tried to overtake them and force them back into Egypt as slaves. The modern Pharaoh, the Antichrist, will try everything possible to destroy the Jews. As the Lord intervened in ancient times to split the water of the Red Sea to offer safe passage for His people, and later made the water to flow back on the seabed when Pharaoh's soldiers tried to follow them, He will again intervene to stop the advance of the Antichrist's powers. In Revelation 12, Israel is depicted as a woman who will have to flee to a place in the wilderness during the middle of tribulation period, where she will be taken care of for 3½ years i.e. 1260 days (Rev. 12:6, 14). The devil is symbolised by a serpent or dragon who chases the woman. The serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman to carry her away by the flood, but the earth tore open and swallowed the flood (Rev. 12:15-16). An earthquake will probably occur, which will stop the advance of the Antichrist's forces, thus allowing the woman to reach her destination in a safe refuge in the mountains.

In this inhospitable place the Lord will probably again, as happened during Israel's exodus from Egypt, supply food and water to the fugitives. It will be a time of distress as Israel have never experienced during their long history (Dan. 12:1). Daniel says: "And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be 1 290 days" (Dan. 12:11). From the moment when the Antichrist desecrates the temple and sets up his image, 1290 days (3½ years + 30 days) will elapse until the end of the year-week and Israel's subsequent spiritual awakening after the coming of Jesus. The extra 30 days will probably be the time of Israel's national mourning when they are reconciled to the Messiah.

During the time of Israel exile the Lord will use special revelations to instruct them and prepare them for what the near future holds for them. It is about this time in the great tribulation that Joel wrote: "... your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those day; and they shall prophesy." These special signs and methods of revelation are not normative for the church age and are nowhere prescribed to us. We have the whole Bible, and the Holy Spirit uses the Word to guide us into all truth.

When Israel move out of their place of refuge at the end of that year-week to await the coming of the Messiah on the Mount of Olives, they will be surrounded by the powers of the Antichrist and again face annihilation. All the nations who are followers of the Antichrist, will besiege Jerusalem to fight against the coming Messiah as they will also be aware of His second coming in the company of a heavenly army (Zech. 14:2; Rev. 19:19). But that will be a bad day for them as the Messiah will indeed come and destroy all the enemy forces (Zech. 14:4-5, 12-13; Rev. 19:20-21).

The remnant in Israel will look upon Him whom they have pierced and bitterly grieve for Him. The national mourning of Israel will be very big and the entire remnant of the nation will be reconciled to Him. They will ask Him what wounds are in His hands, and He will reply: "Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends" (Zech. 13:6). With a shock they will realise that He is Jesus of Nazareth, who was long ago betrayed by Israel and delivered to the Romans to be crucified. He will forgive their unbelief and transgressions and fully accept them as His people. Paul says: "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26).

The millennial reign of peace

Dramatic changes will occur when Christ returns as King of kings: the entire Israel will be saved, the devil will be bound and sealed in a pit so that he should deceive the nations no more, the throne of David will be restored in Jerusalem, and Christ's glorified church will rule with Him in His revealed kingdom. That scenario bears no resemblance to the present, sinful world which lies in the sway of the Evil One. The Lord wants us to take note of these

wonderful promises and prophecies, so we can right now be prepared to participate in His heavenly kingdom of righteousness. It stands to reason that this future expectation demands a high degree of loyalty to the principles of God's kingdom, as well as personal holiness as an answer to sin, corruption, lies and lawlessness which are so prevalent in the present world.

In this review the emphasis was mainly on Israel, up to the second coming of the Messiah. Let us also briefly consider the important and inspiring role which they will play during the Messianic reign. Apart from the Jews who are saved during the church dispensation and will rule together with the glorified church, the whole rest of the nation will consist of mortal but saved people. They will all have changed hearts and serve the Messiah with one accord:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ... No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:31, 34). In the dispensation of the kingdom (Christ's coming reign of peace), Israel will be instrumental in the evangelisation of the world, since the children of parents among all the nations will still be born with a sinful nature and therefore have to be spiritually regenerated to belong to the Lord. "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isa. 27:6).

Because of their important role Israel will be highly regarded by all the nations, who will regularly send deputations to Jerusalem to be instructed in the ways of the Lord: "Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:22-23).

Since the devil will be bound during that time, no deception will take place and only the Christian faith will be recognised and practised: "At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts" (Jer. 3:17).

Jerusalem will be recognised as the capital of the world, all people will live in peace, and there will be no more warfare, military training or the manufacturing of weapons: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isa. 2:2-4).

This is the future vision which the Holy Spirit now gives to people who are committed to walk in the Spirit and faithfully study the Bible, thereby allowing the Holy Spirit to teach them the things to come. Are you well informed on these things which are still hidden to the unbelieving world? We should contemplate the deep things of God's everlasting kingdom:

"But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:9-10). Devote yourself to this study and gain a vision of the everlasting kingdom which is now being prepared for all those who responded positively to the Lord's world-wide call to repent and come over out of spiritual and moral darkness into His marvellous light.

12. Two Kingdoms, Two Messiahs, Two Marriages

Scripture reading: Revelation 17:1-7; 19:7-9.

The two major spiritual realities which face all people on earth are described in the Bible as two kingdoms – the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Two descriptive names which are often used for them are the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. Although these two kingdoms operate from a spiritual sphere, both of them are preparing to be revealed physically on earth. God's kingdom will be revealed under authority of His Son, Jesus Christ, who will rule the world from the restored throne of David in Jerusalem. Satan's kingdom will be revealed under the authority of the Antichrist. He will impose his authority on Jerusalem but actively rule from ancient Babylonia, which is currently part of the rich oil-producing countries of the Middle East under the domination of Islam.

These two kings will not only be political and economic leaders but specifically also religious leaders. Spiritually speaking, both of them will have a wife – the wife of the Lamb (the true church of Christ) and the wife of the Antichrist (an alliance of false world religions). These two women will share in the glory of their respective leaders, actively worship them, and also rule with them. The one marriage will continue forever, but the other one will end disastrously after only 3½ years when the Antichrist will exalt himself to the position of God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and then separate from his wife.

It is important that we know about these two marriages as every person on earth is a member of one of the two groups. Those who form part of Christ's bridal congregation (born-again Christians) are commanded to prepare for the marriage of the Lamb, so they can appear before Him in a spotless robe. They should pursue sanctification under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, those who are part of the opposing kingdom (everybody outside of true Christianity, including unsaved, nominal Christians) are influenced to be as ecumenical, multireligious, and globalist as possible in their worldview, so as to be acceptable to the universal messiah (Rev. 13:3-4, 8) and the universal god of all faiths (2 Cor. 4:4). They are engaged in a fierce battle against evangelical Christianity who refuse to compromise with other faiths and to join the ecumenical movement.

True and false presentations of the bride of Christ

Jesus Christ is the Saviour of lost humanity. However, He did not only come to the world to pay the ransom for our sins on the cross, but also to enter into a life-long relationship of love with His disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). We must be changed by His love and the working of His Holy Spirit to such an extent that we become conformable to His image. The final objective with this process is that the members of Christ's bridal congregation will one day appear before Him blameless and irreprouchable.

The Lord Jesus loves us like a man cares for his wife and loves her, and He enables us through sanctification as a further work of grace to appear before Him in a spotless robe: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). Christ therefore did not only give Himself over for us to cleanse us through the first blessing of regeneration but also to prepare us through the further blessing of sanctification to appear before him without blemish.

The bride herself also has a big responsibility to live a life of dedication through the Holy Spirit, thereby preparing her bridal robe: "... the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for

the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:7-8). The righteous acts of the saints are the fruit of the Holy Spirit in a completely surrendered life. In the same way in which marriage couples have to strengthen their marriage relationship and grow together, we also have to work on our relationship with the heavenly Bridegroom, so Christ can become more while we, as His sanctified bride, can increase in our commitment to be His witnesses.

We should be mindful of the fact that we have to fulfil our spiritual calling in a hostile environment which is part of a world which largely lies in the sway of the Evil One (I John 5:19). The alternative kingdom of Satan uses the most deceptive and subtle techniques to portray its false messiah/king in the guise of an angel of light in an effort to render him acceptable to all faiths. He will appear on the world scene as a multireligious prince of peace to build a bridge between all faiths, thereby trying to equally identify with all of them – also with the ecumenical Christians who wrongly think that all faiths worship the same God. The Jesus of Christianity is misrepresented and His image distorted by denying His divine attributes, thereby endeavouring to prepare the way to someone else to be presented in the place of the true Christ as the universal christ of all faiths.

It is surprising that many Christians are already receptive to false propaganda of this nature. They offer no resistance to wrong presentations of the Lord Jesus, distorted versions of the gospel, and spiritual manifestations which are glaringly foreign to the Holy Spirit. In fact, they happily join the stream of ecumenical thinking under the guidance of false teachers who twist the truth to their own destruction (2 Pet. 2:1; 3:16). Paul seriously warned against false doctrines as they offer points of entry to the kingdom of darkness:

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted – you may well put up with it!” (2 Cor. 11:2-4). False teachers are perverting the gospel of the true Christ under the instigation of deceiving spirits (Gal. 1:7-8).

There are many distortions of the biblical Jesus, e.g. the very popular historical Jesus who did not have a divine origin, did not atone for sins through his crucifixion, did not rise from the grave, did not ascend to heaven and will therefore not return to earth from there. The gospel is also changed to such an extent that it loses its uniqueness and opens the way to salvation which may be obtained through any faith – all paths lead to Rome! The embracing of these lies which are proclaimed under the influence of deceiving spirits, cause large numbers of people to depart from the true faith (1 Tim. 4:1). Unfaithfulness towards the true Christ leads to loyalty to the false christ (2 John 2:18-29).

The bride of the Antichrist

John describes the evil woman who rides the beast as: “Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” She is a parent organisation, and therefore an ecumenical body (or movement) which operates in close association with the Antichrist. Babylon was the place of origin of all the false religions. In ancient times they built the tower of Babel as a symbol of their self-exaltation and self-deification. After the fall of the tower of Babel the false religions established themselves among the nations and succeeded in subjecting millions of people to their power of delusion. They are now re-emerging and joining hands to give new expression to their common origin from the “mother of prostitutes”. This is an end-time effort to muster religious power and use it to promote the ideal of false world unity. They endeavour to collaborate with political leaders to achieve their purpose, and that paves the way towards their future association and “marriage” with the Antichrist. He will empower them, and from their ranks the Antichrist will appoint his co-ruler, the false prophet.

Multireligious ecumenical bodies have already become part of the end-time world. After a relatively small beginning in 1893, the Parliament of the World's Religions organised a very big conference in Chicago in 1993, which was attended by 7 000 delegates representing 250 religions and occult groups. In 1999, an equally big conference was held in Cape Town, and they still proceed with their programme to organise international conferences. The last one was held in Salt Lake City, USA, in 2015. Apart from this organisation there is also the United Religions Initiative that was founded during the millennium celebrations of the United Nations. They also have regular meetings. The World Council of Churches has, since its inception in 1948, become more and more multireligious as they do not hold meetings without inviting representatives of the major world religions. The same interfaith approach is followed by the Vatican, giving rise to frequent interfaith meetings in Italy.

The structures have already been established for the eschatological prostitute who will represent all the false world religions, worship the Antichrist as the universal christ of all faiths, and fully collaborate with him. This woman will be his bride, in imitation of the true church who is the bride of the true Christ. This close association emphasises the fact that there will be a marriage between religion and politics in the world government of the Antichrist, and that explains why the whole world will worship him. John says:

“And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon [the false god of this world] who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him? ... It was granted to him to make war with the saints [the martyrs of the tribulation] and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:3-4, 7-8).

The intimate bond between the Antichrist and the multitudes who will worship him, will continue right through the first half of the tribulation period. Among them will be orthodox Jews who will be under the impression that he is their promised Messiah (cf. John 5:43). He will, among others, give Israel the right to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, but that will be with the sinister purpose of offering the temple service as an alternative to faith in the Messiah, Yeshua. Furthermore, the false messiah will have the evil objective of declaring himself to be God in the rebuilt temple. That will be in the middle of the year-week of seven years.

Daniel says of the Antichrist: “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate” (Dan. 9:27). After 3½ years he will summarily abolish the sacrificial service of the Jews and then profane the temple by setting up an image of himself in the Most Holy place. Paul says that this man of sin and adversary of God's Son will “exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4).

He will order the Jews, as well as the adherents of all the other false religions, to immediately discontinue their own religious practices and to start only worshipping him as God. All who refuse to do so will be executed on the spot: “He [the false prophet] was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Rev. 13:15).

The consequence of this development will be that the Antichrist's marriage with his harlot wife will be suddenly terminated and all her places of worship destroyed. She and all her followers will then be confronted with the choice of either becoming slaves of the Antichrist and worship him as God, or to be executed should they refuse to worship him as God. John says that the

ten kings who ruled together with Antichrist during the first half of the seven-year tribulation, will transfer their power and authority to the Antichrist at the midpoint of the tribulation period when he will institute a military dictatorship under his sole rule (Rev. 17:12-13). They will give their full collaboration to disband and destroy the alliance of world religions: "And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire" (Rev. 17:16). Jews who refuse to worship the Antichrist as God will have to flee for survival from Jerusalem and surrounding areas in great haste to escape the ensuing fury of the great tribulation (Matt. 24:15-21).

That will be the tragic end of the Antichrist's wife who, for the proverbial mess of pottage, denied the true Messiah and sold her right of rebirth, only to get recognition and power from the Antichrist for a limited period. Any agreement or covenant with the devil or his false king, is effectively an alliance with death.

Marriage of the true Christ

How different is the situation with the bride of the true Christ! The Bridegroom will descend from heaven with the sound of the trumpet of God, snatch away His bride from the earth, meet her in the air and then immediately take her back with Him to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-18; John 14:2-3). The marriage of the Lamb will take place in an ivory palace which is so illustrious that it cannot be described in a human language. Paul says about this heavenly glory: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). In the marriage song for the Messiah/King this wonderful occasion is described as follows:

"You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips; therefore, God has blessed You forever. ... Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom. ... Kings' daughters are among Your honourable women; at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir. ... The royal daughter is all glorious within the place; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colours; the virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You. With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought; they shall enter the King's palace" (Ps. 45:2-15).

The wife of the Lamb will be with Him in heaven for the entire seven years while the tribulation period under the rule of the Antichrist takes its course on earth. After the seven years she will return to earth with Christ to be revealed with Him in glory (Zech. 14:4-5; Col. 3:4). The marriage feast of the Lamb – that is the festive celebration after the marriage – will then take place here on earth. It is for this reason that Revelation 19:7 refers to the wife of the Lamb who will be revealed on this festive occasion, and no longer only to His bride.

It is with a view to the marriage in heaven, but also with a view to the subsequent feast on earth, that the bride of the Lamb is now working on her bridal robe through the righteous acts of the saints. This life of service and dedication to the Lord can only be led under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with His enabling power. To be fit for this life, every Christian should have an experience of the cleansing of his heart and the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Do not make the mistake of being content with regeneration alone, and then sit back and try to toil along as a carnal Christian without the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Accept the message of Pentecost which promises the enduing with power from on high, as that will ensure that you won't appear before the Lord at the end of your life with empty hands – saved yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:15). The promise of the filling of the Holy Spirit was made to all Christians (Acts 1:8), and it is extremely worthwhile to humble yourself and be cleansed from all filthiness of the spirit and the flesh. Also confess your fleshly state and surrender it to be crucified – then alone will God's Spirit take full control of your life and enable you to prepare for the glorious occasion of the marriage of the Lamb.